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SPOTLIGHT

VICTOR OSIMHEN

"There is so much more to come from me"

REVIEW

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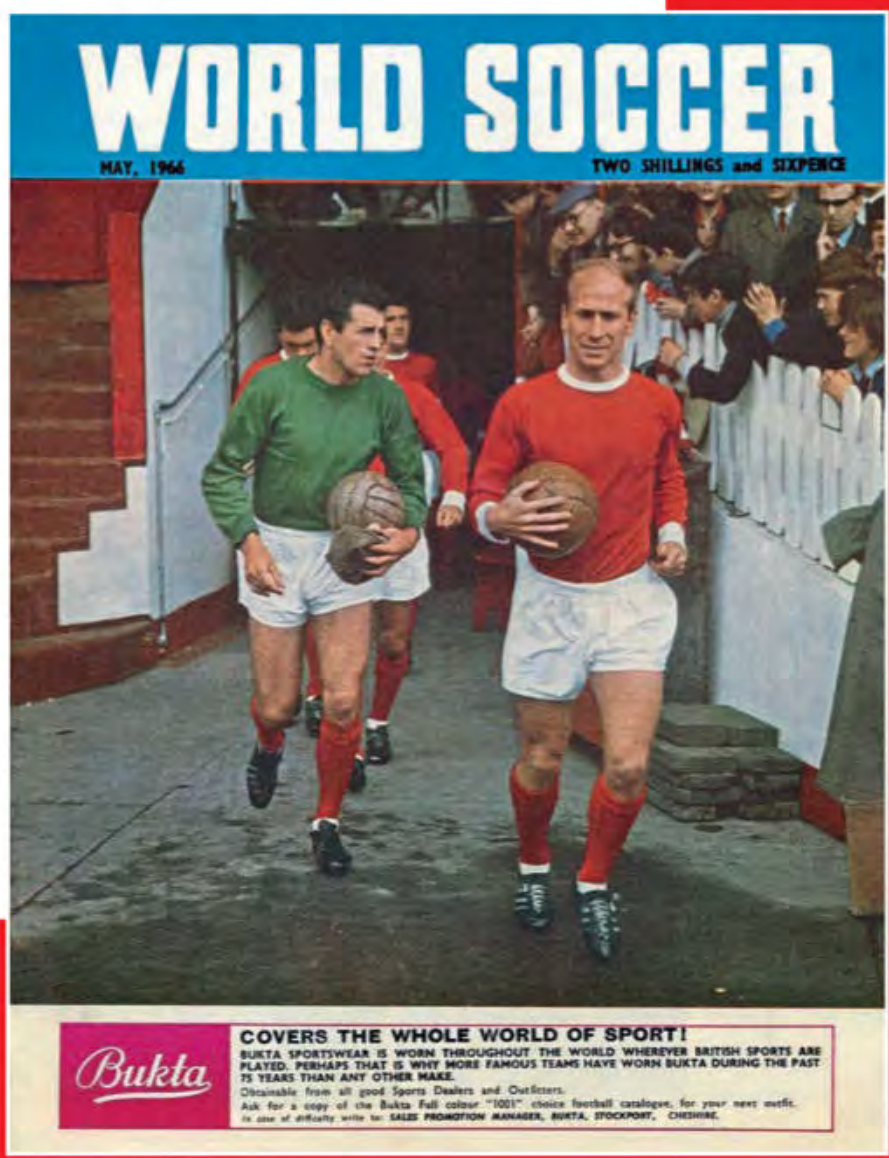
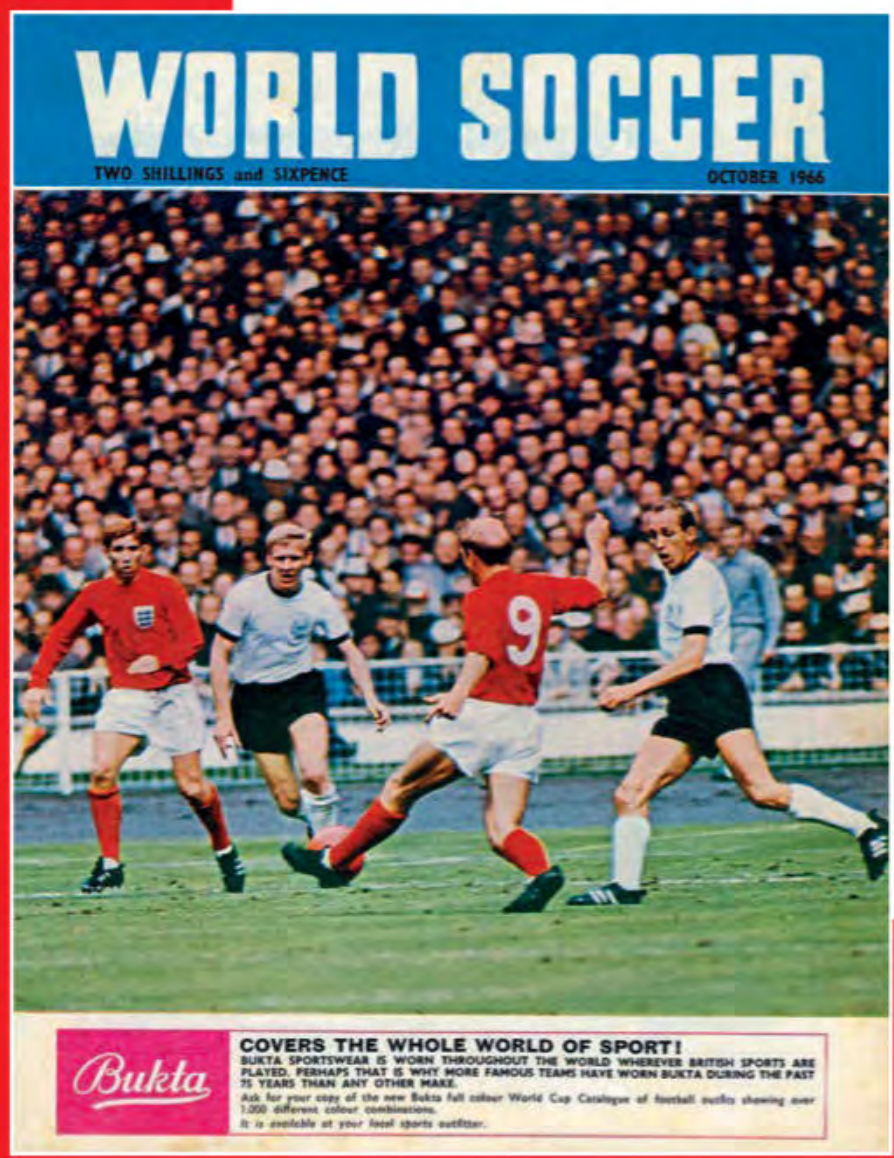
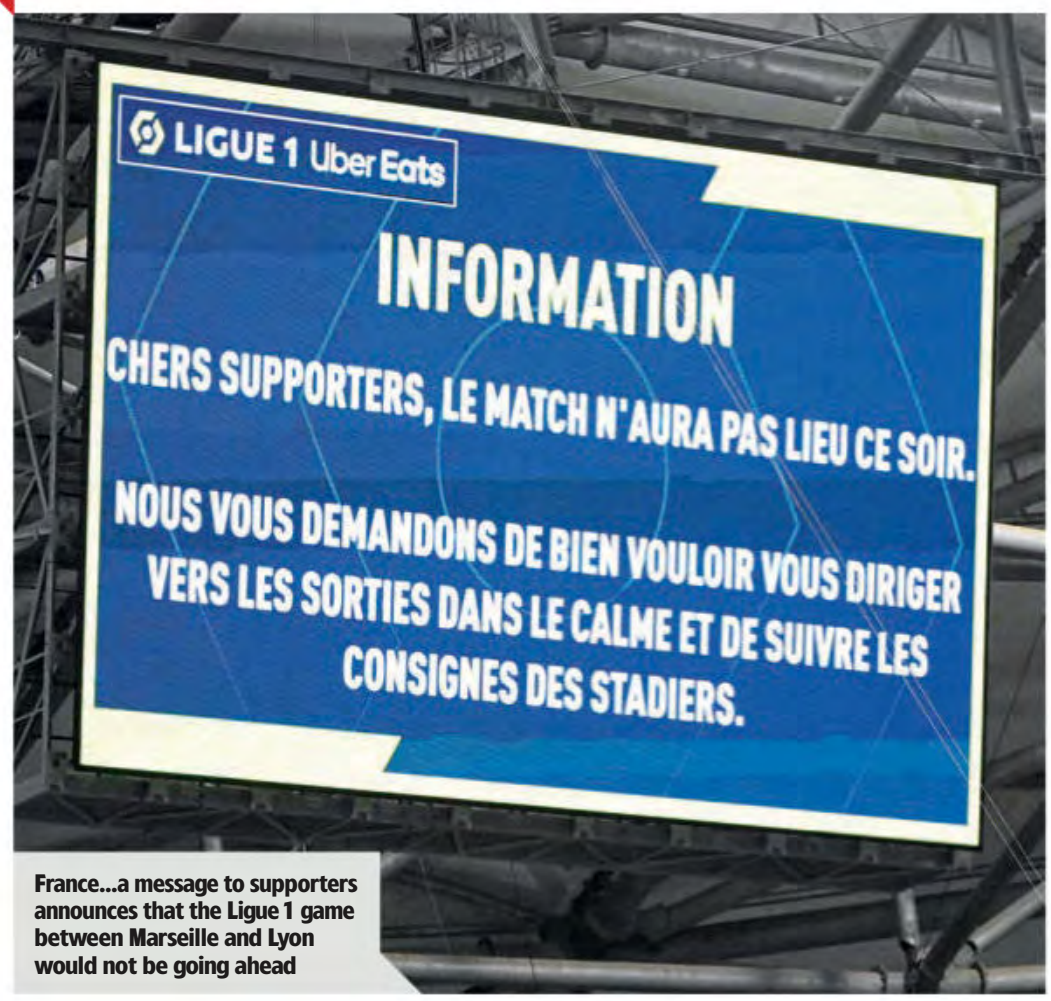
The global game caught on camera





ABOVE: Cover star...Bobby Charlton features (clockwise) on the May 1966, October 1966, August 1968 and July 1969 editions of *World Soccer* during his playing days
OPPOSITE: Tribute...the England legend's statue outside Old Trafford is adorned with a Manchester United scarf after the football icon's death was announced in October

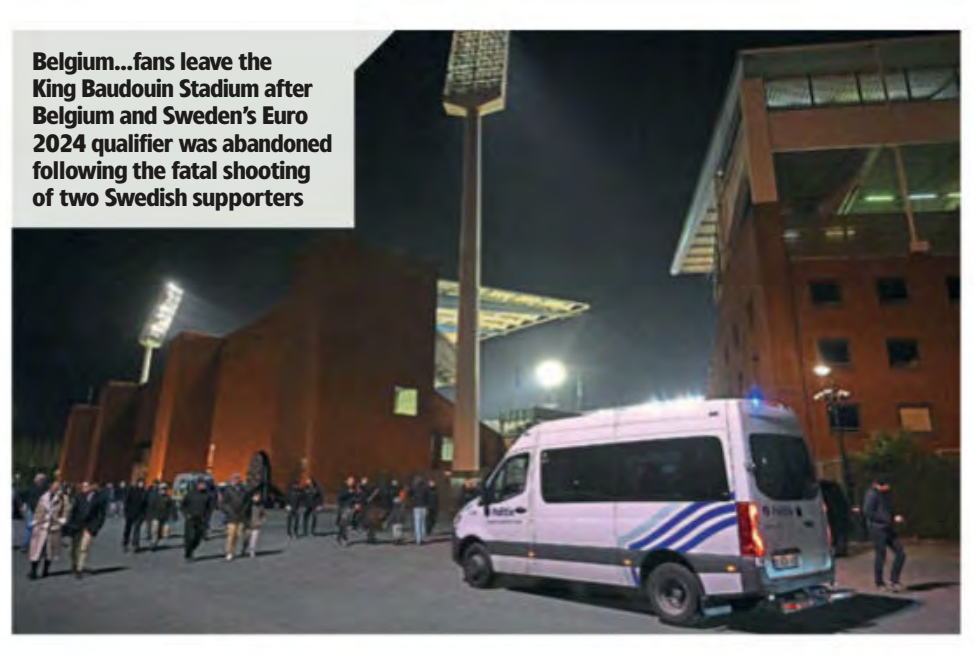


France...a message to supporters announces that the Ligue 1 game between Marseille and Lyon would not be going ahead

Hungary...Romania's Denis Dragus flies into a tackle on Belarus' Zakhar Volkov during Euro 2024 qualifying

England...Liverpool winger Luis Diaz reveals a message for his father, who was kidnapped in his home country of Colombia, after scoring against Luton Town in the Premier League

Germany...players and fans of third-tier Saarbrucken celebrate after their dramatic late winner against Bayern Munich in the German Cup



Belgium...fans leave the King Baudouin Stadium after Belgium and Sweden's Euro 2024 qualifier was abandoned following the fatal shooting of two Swedish supporters

Spain...Jude Bellingham celebrates scoring Real Madrid's second goal against Barcelona to win the *Clasico*

Pakistan...Pakistan's players celebrate beating Cambodia to qualify for the group phase of Asia's 2026 World Cup qualifying campaign

Uruguay...Ecuadorian side Liga de Quito lift the Copa Sudamericana trophy after beating Fortaleza of Brazil on penalties in the final

Tanzania...the opening ceremony of the first-ever African Football League match in Dar es Salaam

Brazil... legendary full-back Marcelo lifts the Copa Libertadores trophy after Fluminense's victory over Boca Juniors in the final

Uruguay...Brazil forward Neymar signals to the bench in agony after sustaining an ACL injury in World Cup qualifying

Trinidad & Tobago... Guatemala keeper Nicholas Hagen watches as Alvin Jones' penalty for Trinidad & Tobago goes in during a CONCACAF Nations League match

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FROM THE ASSISTANT EDITOR

There are some figures in football that you simply take for granted as ever-present pillars of the national game, and Bobby Charlton is one of them. A star of Manchester United almost as soon as he made his debut in 1956, there are few fans that can recall English football before Charlton. He left an indelible mark on the game as a player, is rightly considered the finest English footballer of all time, and remained a huge presence in his role as an ambassador for United. The image of his empty seat in the Old Trafford directors' box, with a scarf draped over the back, was a particularly poignant moment in October's Manchester derby.

Watching old footage of Charlton is like watching a man playing against children. Not in his physical stature, but in the way that he played games entirely at his own pace. Quicker than everyone else, smarter than everyone else, he seemed capable of bending games entirely to his will, while his ability to pass and shoot off either foot from any distance makes for a unique highlights reel. In our first edition since Charlton's death was announced, Keir Radnedge and Jonathan Wilson pay tribute to the legendary midfielder.

> Watching old footage of Charlton is like watching a man playing against children

It seems oddly fitting that Charlton should pass away just as another English midfielder with a similar swagger and goalscoring ability begins to make his mark at an elite level. Jude Bellingham has been exceptional since joining Real Madrid, capping his early displays with a match-winning brace against Barcelona in the *Clasico*. We've taken a closer look at his form in our season update section, along with a number of other talking points from Europe's top five leagues.

Elsewhere, Ajax are suffering their worst-ever start to a season, Fluminense are heading for the upcoming Club World Cup as the champions of South America, and the Africa Cup of Nations and Asian Cup are both inching ever closer. We've covered all these stories, and more, in this issue.

Jamie Evans, Assistant Editor

Ballon d'Or winners... Lionel Messi and Aitana Bonmati

BALLON D'OR

Messi wins record-extending eighth Ballon d'Or

Lionel Messi extended his record as the player with the most Ballon d'Or wins after collecting the award for the eighth time at a ceremony in Paris.

Despite a relatively low-key year in club football for the Argentine, winning only the Ligue 1 title with Paris Saint-Germain and the Leagues Cup with Inter Miami, Messi's exploits in firing his country to the World Cup trophy in Qatar were enough to see off competition from Erling Haaland.

The Norwegian striker finished more than 100 votes behind Messi, despite firing Manchester City to the treble with 52 goals in all competitions last season. His team-mates Kevin De Bruyne and Rodri finished fourth and fifth respectively, with third-placed Kylian Mbappe making up the top five.

Jude Bellingham won the Kopa Trophy, presented to the best young player in the world, with Argentina's Emiliano Martinez recognised as the goalkeeper of the year with the Yashin Trophy.

In the women's category, Aitana Bonmati succeeded her Spain and Barcelona team-mate Alexia Putellas as the winner of the Ballon d'Or Feminin. The award organisers did, however, come under criticism for organising the ceremony in the middle of a women's international break, which meant that many nominees could not attend, while choosing tennis legend Novak Djokovic to present

"It is important that measures are put in place to ensure our national game is fit for the future, which is exactly what an Independent Regulator will do"

MP Tracey Crouch reacts to confirmation that the UK government will introduce an independent regular to monitor English football

the award also raised eyebrows.

Australia and Chelsea striker Sam Kerr, third the last two years, moved up to second, but she did have the consolation of claiming the Asian Football Confederation's award.

The 2023 World Soccer award winners will be revealed in next month's issue

FIFA

Saudi sights set on 2030s

Saudi Arabia will host the 2034 World Cup after FIFA confirmed that the Middle Eastern country was the only remaining bidder for the finals.

The verdict was confirmed when Australia, the last potential challenger to the Saudis, decided against bidding just before the deadline at the end of October. Due to FIFA's rules on rotating the finals around the confederations, only an AFC member was eligible to bid, with CONCACAF (United States, Canada, Mexico) hosting in 2026 and CONMEBOL, UEFA and CAF (Uruguay, Argentina, Paraguay; Spain, Portugal; Morocco) sharing hosting duties in 2030.

In addition, Monika Staab, the technical director of Saudi Arabia's Women's side hinted that the country could host the following year's Women's World Cup as well. Like the men's league, the Saudi Women's Premier League has received extra funding this season, and improving the national team is the next target.

"We're now getting a team ready to be at least competing at that level," said Staab. "It takes time to go to the World Cup. I know they want to host the men's World Cup – why not host the Women's World Cup in 2035?"

The month in numbers

Eye-catching facts and stats from the world of football this month...

10
Months that Newcastle United and Italy midfielder Sandro Tonali will miss for breaching betting rules. The verdict came after Juventus' Nicolo Fagioli received a seven-month ban.

Banned... Newcastle's Sandro Tonali

1
In England's friendly with Australia, Stephanie Frappart became the first female referee to take charge of a men's international at Wembley.

2
Years that San Marino had to wait to score a competitive goal before Alessandro Golinucci found the back of the net against Denmark in a Euro 2024 qualifier in October.

40
Age of Porto defender Pepe – 40 years and 254 days to be exact – as he became the oldest goalscorer in UEFA Champions League history following his effort against Antwerp.

14
Consecutive Europa League matches that Romelu Lukaku scored in – a run stretching over nine years and three different clubs (Everton, Internazionale and Roma).

3
Years that former Spanish football federation boss Luis Rubiales has been banned from all football-related activities for by FIFA.

276
Minutes that it took for November's Ukrainian Premier League clash between Dnipro-1 and Oleksandriya to be completed – the longest match in the league's history – after frequent interruptions due to air-raid warnings.

270
Number of English Premier League matches that will be televised live in its next rights cycle, an increase from 200.

19
Consecutive matches that Fenerbahce had won in all competitions at the start of the season, before their run was brought to an end in November by Trabzonspor.

14
Number of players that have won both the Copa Libertadores and UEFA Champions League after former Real Madrid left-back Marcelo lifted the trophy with Fluminense.

4
Tier of French football that Bourges Foot 18 – the club that has just been purchased by Senegal superstar Sadio Mane – play in.

44
Penalties taken in a marathon shootout between Ballymena United and Coleraine in the Northern Irish League Cup. Only two shootouts have ever lasted longer.

52
Home games that Tottenham manager Ange Postecoglou remained unbeaten for – starting at Japanese giants Yokohama F. Marinos in November 2020 and continuing throughout his time at Scottish champions Celtic – before losing 4-1 to Chelsea in November.

£6m
The prize fund for this year's Women's FA Cup, doubling the figure from last season.

Increased prize fund...the Women's FA Cup

Keir RADNEDGE

THE INSIDER

Roy of the Rovers brought to life

Bobby Charlton was a genius on the pitch and a gentleman off it

England legend... Bobby Charlton during the 1966 World Cup

Sir Bobby Charlton spanned multiple football generations. This may help account for the outpouring of sorrow, appreciation and gratitude on his death. His passing, at 86, was not unexpected but no less painful, above all for family and friends, but also for a game too often lacking in the qualities he epitomised.

Three years ago, his family had announced his dementia diagnosis, the fifth member of England's 1966 World Cup winning XI to fall victim to "the long goodbye." His elder brother and England team-mate Jack died from a similar condition in 2020. Sir Geoff Hurst is now the last survivor from that Wembley side of July 30, 1966.

Charlton's death provoked an immense sense of shock and loss. Not only in England – for many years, the name "Bobby Charlton" was sufficient to generate happy

smiles of welcome whenever English tourists travelled abroad, as they did far less frequently back then.

Charlton represented the best of all of us. He was the pride of England. He rose to teenage fame in a time when football was rarely seen on television, other than the FA Cup final and occasional snatches of England internationals or exotic ties in the new-fangled European Cup.

It was in this context that Manchester United's Busby Babes, personifying the hopes of an optimistic new post-war generation, exploded on an English Football League whose standout heroes had been the likes of Wolves' Billy Wright, Preston's Tom Finney, Bolton's Nat Lofthouse and, above all, Stanley Matthews.

An icon both within football and beyond, Matthews was the apparently eternal outside-right who never troubled referees, did not drink, did not smoke and topped up his fitness levels by running along Blackpool beach. He was considered the perfect gentleman footballer; the spirit that Charlton would assume.

Those characteristics were evident off the pitch and beyond their playing days. This writer can attest to this, having enjoyed privileged opportunities as an occasional ghost writer for both men when the modern circus of sponsors and publicists clamoured to sprinkle their more genteel stardust across the game's aggressive expansion at club, country and competition level.

Here was the inner footballing Charlton: picking up the almost idealistic sportsman's legacy from Matthews. Their careers overlapped by almost a decade. Charlton made his Manchester United debut in October 1956 while Matthews tantalised down the right wing until beyond his 50th birthday in 1965.

A year later, England, with Charlton at the heart of both team and nation, attained the pinnacle of World Cup triumph. The clips of his all-important goals have been replayed constantly since his death: the group stage breakthrough against Mexico followed by the two semi-final killers against Portugal. This was Charlton in his second, most magnificent era. The footballer possessed with the ability to either lead a winning assault or rescue a losing battle. Whatever the match moment demanded.

Not that the style and manner of his goalscoring execution was anything new to United fans. They were happily familiar with his superb ability to strike a football, which was all the more remarkable considering the weight of those balls, years before the development of today's swerve-happy composites, not to mention the extra weight added by thick layers of mud.

Charlton in full flow was a sight that sent a tremor rippling through a stadium. Far more to it than the clip-familiar couple of strides and save-defying thunder of his shot, Charlton, when given the ball just inside the opposition half, possessed an innate ability to envision the opportunity: a lift of the head to get a sight of the goal and the keeper, while simultaneously identifying the co-ordinates of the defenders up ahead, meshed with the awareness and self-confidence that a feint one way and a dip of the shoulder in the other could prise open time and space to let fly.

This was both football poetry and natural-born science in motion. Then the celebration, the cheers, a shake of the head and pragmatic trot back into position for the restart.

By the time of his retirement in 1973, Charlton had registered a then-record 49 goals in 106 England appearances and won five major trophies with United. He collected a host of individual awards at home and abroad including the domestic and European Footballer of the Year accolades in 1966. He was honoured with an OBE in 1969, a CBE in 1974 and then a far-too-long-delayed knighthood in 1994.

Charlton in full flow was a sight that sent a tremor rippling through a stadium

Cover star...Charlton adorns the front cover of the August 1970 issue of *World Soccer*

The honours that came in later life were well-deserved for both his achievements and the humility of the manner in which he carried his genius. Not all of England's heroes from 1966 were fortunate enough to shoulder their garlands into their 80s. Down the years, he kept his feet on the ground. Among all the tributes are countless individual tales of a warm word, a friendly gesture and stories of how he calmed the concerns of nervous fellow flyers on planes.

His life and career were enhanced by more even than personal respect and admiration for his achievements on the pitch. The legend that was Bobby Charlton was in having accomplished so much after rising beyond the tragic drama of the Munich air disaster in 1958. Hence the emotional catharsis in leading United to European Cup victory over Benfica in 1968. Not only was Charlton playing that memorable night at Wembley, he was United's captain and scored two of their four goals.

This might have been *Roy of the Rovers* stuff, but for him it was all real. This was Bobby Charlton as we knew him and football will never forget him.

BOOKS THIS MONTH

EL MÁS GRANDE
By Mark Orton
(Pitch Publishing, £25)

From their humble origins in the southern districts of Buenos Aires, River Plate grew into one of the largest clubs in South America, earning the nickname "The Millionaires". Along the way, we discover the great players who have worn the distinctive white shirt with the red sash – from the likes of Bernabe Ferreyra, Alfredo Di Stefano and Enzo Francescoli to Manchester City's recent signing Julian Alvarez – whilst enchanting generations of fans with their stylish play.

FLAMENGO
By Stephen Brandt
(Pitch Publishing, £18.99)

This is the fascinating story of how Brazilian club Flamengo became the best football team in the world, winning cups at every level before beating the mighty Liverpool in 1981 to capture the Intercontinental Cup. We also meet the special players of that golden generation, including the legendary Junior, the underdog Nunes, Zico, the small-statured talent who was dubbed the next Pele, and the brilliant Tita.

Jonathan WILSON
TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

Chasing paradise

Bobby Charlton spent his career pursuing his own football idealism

Four of Bobby Charlton's uncles were professional footballers and, when he was in his early teens, he would follow them to the club and stand at the door while they had a pint inside, imagining the conversations they must be having about football. Yet by the early 1960s, he seemed almost bored by discussions of football. "If you talked about the match," his former team-mate Harry Gregg remembered, "Bobby would pick up his pint and say, 'I'm off if you're going to talk about football'."

Perhaps that's just what happens as you get older; youthful passions fade. Yet Charlton clearly never lost his love for football. He regretted retiring in 1973 and, after a year as manager of Preston, came back as player-manager. Well into the 1990s he would turn out for the English press side. Rather what had made him disillusioned was the form the discussion of football had come to take. For Charlton – unlike his brother Jack – football was not about tactics but about glory, about individuals doing brilliant things, transforming games by their own courage and virtuosity.

That was the football of Manchester United under Matt Busby, the football Charlton had played after breaking into the first team as an 18-year-old, the football that brought the league championship in 1956-57. The systems football of Don Revie and Bill Shankly held little interest for him. He was a romantic who didn't much care for arguments about shape and structure. Munich and its after-effects ossified that. Charlton often described that 18-month period between his debut and the crash, when he played brilliant attacking football with his mates, with Duncan Edwards, David Pegg and Eddie Colman, as "paradise", and found it difficult to accept any deviation from that.

England's greatest... Charlton scores the decisive goal versus Portugal in 1966

> Charlton often described that period when he played brilliant attacking football with Duncan Edwards, David Pegg and Eddie Colman as "paradise", and found it difficult to accept any deviation from that

Even in the early 1960s, there was a feeling at United that Charlton did not always make the best of his immense talent. "As a young player," said Gregg, "Bobby was blessed with fantastic skill, balance, the most incredible change of pace and a rocket shot. The brain and the feet, however, did not work as one." Busby's assistant coach Jimmy Murphy regularly reprimanded him "for 'glory balls'" but even that "lesson in professionalism", as Charlton described it, couldn't entirely temper his instincts.

As time went by, though, he did reluctantly accept the need for greater efficiency. For most of the 1966 World Cup, he was a goalscoring central midfielder, as he had been for both club and country after moving in from the left wing. After England had been held to a 0-0 draw by Uruguay in their opening game, it was Charlton who got their World Cup going with his thunderbolt against Mexico, and he then scored twice in the semi-final win over Portugal.

But the day before the final, Alf Ramsey took him aside. He had watched footage of West Germany's

Paradise... Manchester United's 1956-57 team photo

ten previous games and had realised that the key to stopping them was preventing Franz Beckenbauer, in those days a central midfielder in a 4-2-4, from being able to dictate play. He sat too deep for Nobby Stiles to pick him up, so that meant Charlton had to do it, reining in his attacking impulse. "If we win, everything is justified," Charlton said. "But if the mind said yes, something in my bones wanted to say no." It seems extraordinary now that there would even have been a debate in his head, but whatever doubts he had, Charlton did his job and Beckenbauer was barely involved.

The cathartic European Cup final success two years later, also coming at Wembley, saw Charlton score twice. As the winger John Aston put it, though: "We were like the last man to win Wimbledon with a wooden racquet." Busby's side were playing an only slightly updated version of the football of the 1950s.

That was the football Charlton loved and from which he had very little desire to move on. He had no truck with the coaching courses and theoretical discussion that had started to spring up in the 1960s, and which fascinated his brother. And that, quite as much as his struggles with the politics of club directors and dressing-rooms, perhaps explains why his time as a manager was a failure. "A network of coaches was creating a new culture," he said, "one which could leave you on the outside, however much fame you had won on the field."

But why should fame on the field guarantee you a job in management? Why should coaching be related to ability as a player? The game had moved on, and Charlton remained as a glorious reminder of a past age. He was a *Roy of the Rovers* figure, a brilliant, driven individual whose passing ability and goals from midfield made him probably the greatest English player of all time, and what made it all the more remarkable is that he did it as football was changing all around him.

Kendry PAEZ

(Independiente del Valle)

Among the many young players to have been purchased by Chelsea over the last two years, Paez's name has probably slipped under the radar – not least because the Ecuadorian will not complete his £17.2 million move to Stamford Bridge until he turns 18 in 2025 – but his exploits for the national team mean he will not be an unknown name for long.

In October, he became the youngest-ever goalscorer in South American World Cup qualifying after notching in a 2-1 win against Bolivia at 16 years and 161 days old. It was the latest in a growing list of records: Paez is already the youngest debutant and scorer in Ecuador's top flight, having scored on his debut at the age of 15, while he was also on target in May to become the Under-20 World Cup's youngest-ever scorer too.

Marc GUIU
(Barcelona)
The 17-year-old striker's name had been barely heard outside the walls of *La Masia* when he scored 33 seconds after coming off the bench on his senior Barca debut.

Kenan YILDIZ
(Juventus)
Juve saw off stiff competition to sign the 18-year-old from Bayern Munich in the summer of 2022 and now Turkey are attempting to do the same, handing the German-born attacker – who had already been capped by Turkey's U17 and U21 sides – his senior debut in October.

Lewis FERGUSON
(Bologna)
The midfielder has started strongly for Bologna this season, and is now Serie A's highest-scoring Scottish player of all time after drawing level with Denis Law's record.

Barca's breakout boy wonder ...Marc Guiu

Lewis Ferguson... lighting up Serie A

"The loss of my livelihood is nothing when compared to the hell being unleashed on the innocent and vulnerable in Gaza #stopthekilling"

Anwar El Ghazi releases a statement on social media after having his contract with Mainz terminated

IN

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

31 Moves That Caught Our Eye This Month

OUT

EUROPE

FILIPPO INZAGHI
The ex-Milan manager replaced Paulo Sousa as head coach of Serie A side **Salernitana**.

GABRIELE CIOFFI
Udinese hired Cioffi after firing Andrea Sottil.

PHILIPPE CLEMENT
The ex-Club Brugge and Monaco coach took charge of **Rangers**, replacing Michael Beale.

CRAIG LEVEIN
With **St Johnstone** bottom of the Scottish Premiership table, they hired the former Scotland and Hearts boss as their manager.

JOE EDWARDS
A former youth coach at Chelsea, Edwards took charge of **Millwall** after Gary Rowett's departure.

LIAM MANNING
Championship side **Bristol City** poached Oxford's manager after firing Nigel Pearson.

MARTI CIFUENTES
Elsewhere in the Championship, **QPR** hired the Hammarby boss to replace Gareth Ainsworth.

ANWAR EL GHAZI
Bundesliga side **Mainz** terminated the Dutch winger's contract after a social media post that, according to an earlier club statement, "took a position on the conflict in the Middle East in a manner that wasn't tolerable for the club."

BO SVENSSON
Mainz also parted company with their coach after a difficult start to the Bundesliga season.

SOKRATIS PAPASTATHOPOULOS
Real Betis signed the Greek defender as a free agent after he left Olympiakos.

KASSOUM OUATTARA
Under Ligue 1 rules that allow teams to sign a player outside the transfer window in the event of an injury crisis, **Monaco** completed a €2 million move for the Amiens left-back.

MAMADOU SAKHO
The former Liverpool and France defender was released by **Montpellier** after clashing with head coach Michel Der Zakarian.

JEAN-PHILIPPE GBAMIN
After being released by Everton in the summer, Gbamin joined Ligue 2 strugglers **Dunkerque**.

HELDER COSTA
Two years after his last appearance for the club, **Leeds United** released the winger.

STEVEN DEFOUR
The former Burnley, Anderlecht, Standard Liege and Belgium midfielder left his role as **Mechelen** head coach by mutual consent.

CHRIS COLEMAN
The former Wales boss departed Greek side **Atromitos** after 21 months in charge of the Athens outfit. He was replaced by Sasa Ilic.

KEVIN THEOPHILE-CATHERINE
The defender re-joined **Dinamo Zagreb** as a free agent after leaving the club in the summer.

EMMA HAYES
Chelsea Women's long-serving manager will leave the Blues after 11 years at the end of the season, with a move to the United States Women's national team widely expected.

Chelsea legend... manager Emma Hayes

ASIA

CHRISTOPHE GALTIER
The former PSG boss took charge of Qatari side **Al Duhail**, replacing Hernan Crespo.

ROBBIE FOWLER
The ex-Liverpool striker only lasted eight games at second-tier Saudi side **Al Qadsiah**, despite winning six of them. He was replaced as coach by former Real Madrid midfielder Michel.

YAYA TOURE
The former Manchester City midfielder linked up with his old manager Roberto Mancini, becoming the Italian's assistant in charge of the **Saudi Arabia** national team.

NUNO ESPIRITO SANTO
Saudi champions **Al Ittihad** sacked the former Tottenham manager after a poor run of results.

MAROUANE FELLAINI
The Belgian midfielder's five-year stay in China ended after he announced that he would leave **Shandong Taishan** at the end of his contract.

ASHLEY WESTWOOD
A former player for the likes of Crewe Alexandra, Bradford City, Sheffield Wednesday and Northampton Town, and more recently a coach in India and Malaysia, Westwood took charge of **Afghanistan** ahead of a World Cup qualifier with Qatar in November.

STEVE CORICA
Sydney FC sacked their manager after only three A-League games of the new season.

AURELIO VIDMAR
Elsewhere in the A-League, **Melbourne City** hired Aurelio Vidmar to replace Rado Vidosic.

SOUTH AMERICA

ANTONIO CARLOS ZAGO
Bolivia appointed the Brazilian as their new coach after sacking Gustavo Costas, who lost eight out of ten games in charge of the team.

AFRICA

JUAN CARLOS OSORIO
Egyptian giants **Zamalek** parted ways with the former Mexico and Paraguay boss after a slow start to the 2023-24 season.

CONCACAF

CHRISTINE SINCLAIR
Canada's greatest-ever female player ended a record-breaking international career that included 190 goals in 329 appearances.

PHIL NEVILLE
Five months after being sacked by Inter Miami, the former England defender took charge of **Portland Timbers**. The 2015 MLS champions finished tenth in the 2023 Western Conference.

DOUGLAS COSTA
The former Brazil, Bayern Munich and Juventus winger was released by MLS outfit **LA Galaxy**.

"Devastated to hear the sad news about Bill Kenwright. Known Bill since I was young and he's had a huge impact on me as a person and my career. Great man and a big inspiration"

Former Everton star Wayne Rooney pays his respects to Bill Kenwright

OBITUARIES

Goodison Park remembers...Everton pay tribute to their former chairman

Bill KENWRIGHT
(1945-2023)
Kenwright was Everton's chairman and largest shareholder between 2004 and 2016, but his involvement on the club's board lasted over 34 years.

He made his name in the theatre business, starting out as an actor in the 1960s – notably appearing in the police series *Z-Cars*, the theme tune of which plays at Goodison Park as the players run out onto the pitch, and British soap *Coronation Street*. His great success, though, came as a producer. His company, Bill Kenwright Ltd, is now the most prolific theatre production company in the world, and it was that success that paved the way for him to join Everton's board of directors in 1989.

Kenwright ascended to the role of chairman in 2004 and in his 19 seasons at the helm Everton finished in the top eight 12 times, including fourth place in 2004-05, while they were also FA Cup finalists in 2009, losing 2-1 to Chelsea in spite of Toffees striker Louis Saha scoring the then fastest-ever FA Cup final goal after just 25 seconds.

Kenwright sold a 49.9 per cent stake in the club to British-Iranian businessman Farhad Moshiri in 2016, but continued to serve as a club director right up until his death.

Mario MOINHOS
(1949-2023)
A former Portugal striker who won seven caps for his country, Moinhos scored top-flight goals for the likes of Boavista, Benfica and Espinho.

Reino BORJESSON
(1929-2023)
A midfielder for Swedish sides Jonsereds, IFK Gothenburg, Norrby and Orgryte, Borjesson's career highlight came in the 1958 World Cup when he played in Sweden's run to the final on home soil. He played in four games including the final itself, which Sweden lost 5-2 to Pele's Brazil.

Federico SACCHI
(1936-2023)
An Argentine Football Association Hall of Famer, Sacchi was a revered central defender during the 1950s and '60s, winning 15 Argentina caps and representing Newell's Old Boys, Racing Club and Boca Juniors, winning two championship titles in the process.

Oussama FALOUH
(1999-2023)
The 24-year-old defender arrived at Moroccan giants Wydad Casablanca in the summer, but was tragically killed in a car crash before he could make his debut.

Charlie AITKEN
(1942-2023)
No player in the history of Aston Villa has played more games for the club than Aitken, who spent 17 years at Villa Park. During that time, the club went from the First Division down to the Third and all the way back up again, with the left-back racking up 660 appearances in the process. He ended his career in the United States, playing two seasons for New York Cosmos alongside Franz Beckenbauer, Pele and Carlos Alberto.

Ronnie Rees...a Nottingham Forest photoshoot in 1971

Ronnie REES
(1944-2023)
The Welsh winger made more than half of his 435 Football League appearances for Coventry City, the West Midlands club whose youth academy he emerged from. After helping the Sky Blues rise from Division Three to Division One in the 1960s, Rees went on to play for West Bromwich Albion, Nottingham Forest and Swansea City, as well as score three goals in 39 caps for Wales.

Bongi NTULI
(1991-2023)
The striker played his last game for South African top-flight side AmaZulu in September, before passing away from a rare form of cancer in early November at the age of 32.

Brighton star... Gerry Ryan in 1979

Gerry RYAN
(1955-2023)
The Republic of Ireland international joined Derby County in 1977 after scoring goals for Irish side Bohemians. A year later he joined Brighton & Hove Albion, going on to spend seven years on the south coast before his career was ended by a broken leg. Ryan won 18 international caps, scoring once.

Bill GATES
(1944-2023)
After a career as a centre-half for Middlesbrough that included starring for Jack Charlton's Division Two promotion-winning side of 1973-74, Gates was forced into early retirement at the age of 30 due to persistent migraines. He is believed to have suffered from a progressive brain disease called Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE), which is caused by repeated blows to the head and cannot be diagnosed while the patient is still alive. Gates' condition inspired his wife, Doctor Judith Gates, to investigate the link between football and brain disease, founding the charities Head For Change and Head Safe Football.

Villa record breaker ...Charlie Aitken in action in the 1960s

Francis LEE
(1944-2023)
*In *World Soccer*'s November obituaries, we incorrectly stated that Francis Lee was the first Englishman to be red-carded at a World Cup, against Brazil in 1970. He was in fact the first Englishman to receive a *yellow card* at the World Cup.

Bobby Dazzler

Keir Radnedge pays tribute to the legendary Sir Bobby Charlton

Football was in the blood for Bobby Charlton. But that has been spoken and written about countless other footballers, great and forgotten. Charlton's status in the pantheon of not only English but world football relates to the humanity and class which shone throughout his career, and lifetime, achievements.

The Charltons were relatives of the great Newcastle United hero of the 1950s, Jackie Milburn. They began kicking a ball in the back streets of the town of Ashington in the northeast of England where their father was a coal miner. Charlton escaped a life down the pit when he fulfilled every schoolboy's dream, at 17, by signing professional terms for Manchester United.

Matt Busby had invested more time and determination than any other manager in seeking out the finest young talents in the country. Not only Charlton, but Duncan Edwards, Eddie Colman, David Pegg and many more had been singled out for the Old Trafford treatment: turned from boys into young footballing men under the tutelage of assistant Jimmy Murphy, and then promoted to explode into the old First Division and the European Cup.

This was the philosophy behind the Busby Babes, the team of youngsters who took the league by storm in the mid-1950s and brought a breath of optimistic fresh air into an austere post-war England. The sense of that spirit of a new generation being lost exacerbated the nation's grief when United's plane crashed in the Munich airport snow and ice on their way home from a European Cup quarter-final in Belgrade in February 1958.

Charlton, still in his seat, had been thrown clear of the plane as it crashed off the end of the Riem runway. He suffered only a few scratches but the mental scars can hardly be imagined. As he asked later with many a survivor's rhetorical angst: "Why me?" To return to football at all after losing eight team-mates was remarkable; to honour their memory with such achievements was almost beyond words.

Charlton had established his first-team potential the previous season. He made his debut in the old First Division in October 1956 against Charlton Athletic, of all clubs. He was initially an inside-right or inside-left, developing his pace and thunderous shot to score some of the most spectacular goals English football has ever seen.

United were league champions and FA Cup runners-up in 1956-57, Charlton's first season. Remarkably, given all the immediate post-Munich circumstances, they reached Wembley again a year later, with Charlton one ▸

World Cup winner ...Charlton lifts the Jules Rimet trophy

Send off...Charlton leaves the pitch after playing his final game for Manchester United

of four Munich survivors (along with Harry Gregg, Bill Foulkes and Dennis Viollet) in another losing FA Cup final. United were league runners-up to Wolves in 1959 then finished seventh twice, including the 1960-61 season when Charlton was their top league scorer with 21 goals.

These were difficult years. In 1962-63, United flirted with relegation but recovered well enough to go on to win the FA Cup for the only time in Charlton's career. By then, Denis Law had been recruited to help ease the attacking burden on Charlton.

The league title was reclaimed in 1964-65 and 1966-67, providing the springboard for the historic European Cup-winning campaign in 1967-68. In the second leg of the semi-finals, Charlton and his team-mates fell 3-1 behind to Real Madrid at the Bernabeu. "The world seemed to be collapsing around us," he said, yet United recovered to draw 3-3 on the night and win 4-3 on aggregate. He later told this writer that that was the most dramatic match he ever played, a remarkable reflection considering he went on to inspire a breathtaking finale as United's two-goal captain in the 4-1 extra-time defeat of Benfica and Eusebio.

United's "holy trinity" of Charlton, Law and George Best were team-mates without being friends but their statue at Old Trafford stands as a worthy tribute to their era.

Lifting the European Cup at Wembley proved to be Charlton's club career apotheosis. His United won nothing else and slithered down the league to 18th in 1972-73, his final season. United's struggles were illustrated by the fact that Charlton was their league top scorer with a mere seven goals. He had been gone a year, for a brief stint as player-manager at Preston, when United were relegated in 1974.

Charlton's 758 matches and 249 goals for United long stood as club records, as did his 49 goals for England.

> To return to football at all after losing eight team-mates was remarkable; to honour their memory with such achievements was almost beyond words

His first goal – a trademark power-drive – marked his debut against Scotland in 1958, another broke the 1966 World Cup group stage deadlock against Mexico, while two more beat Portugal in the semi-finals.

Sir Walter Winterbottom was the England manager who had awarded Charlton his debut only two months after Munich. Winterbottom, a man of his time within a sclerotic FA, has been treated unkindly by many new-era revisionists but he recognised Charlton's talent – even if he was baffled as how best to deploy the then-20-year-old. He was certainly misguided in thrusting Charlton so soon into an England team heading to the 1958 World Cup without Munich victims Roger Byrne, Duncan Edwards and centre-forward Tommy Taylor. Charlton lined up at inside-right as England lost 5-0 to Yugoslavia in a pre-finals friendly, was promptly dropped and watched the World Cup from the stands.

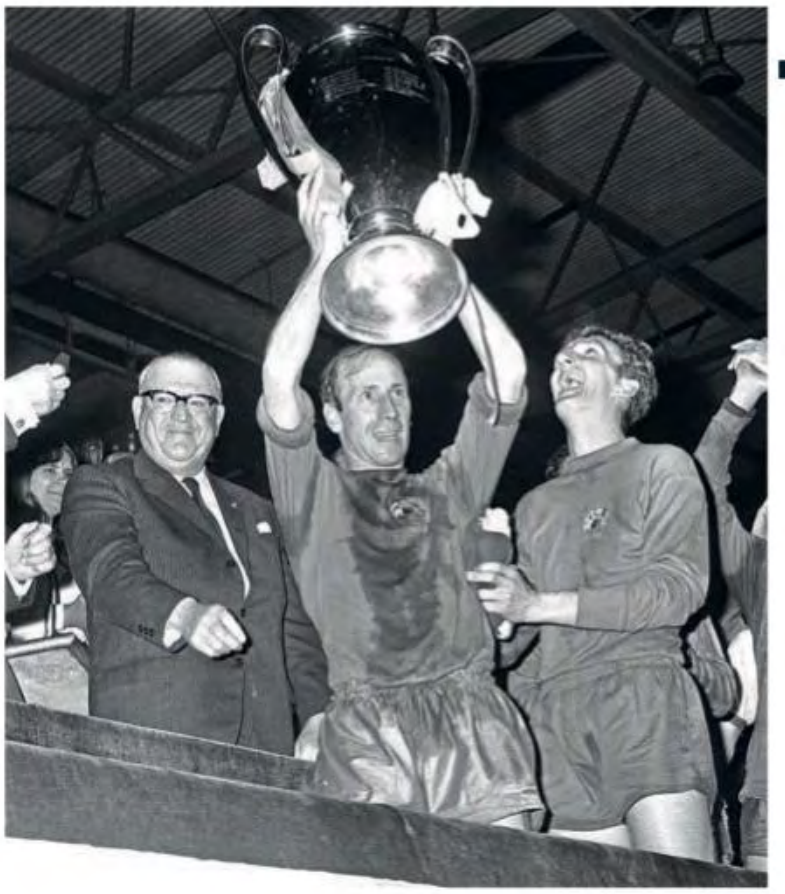
The next season, Charlton was back in favour but Winterbottom continued to struggle to find a position to suit his talents. One significant obstacle was the presence of Fulham's Johnny Haynes as playmaking inside-left. Everyone else, Charlton included, had to be slotted in around Haynes, but never convincingly.

Matters changed after Winterbottom led England on a generally disastrous four-match end-of-season tour of the Americas. Charlton hit the bar as centre-forward in a 2-0 defeat by Brazil, was anonymous in a 4-1 defeat in Peru and was then switched, in desperation, to outside-left in a 2-1 defeat by Mexico. He stayed there to respond with a hat-trick in an 8-1 victory against the United States in Los Angeles.

In the autumn of 1960 Winterbottom decided to imitate those clubs who had embraced the 4-2-4 system deployed by Brazil in their 1958 World Cup win. The freedom of that outside-left role was perfect for Charlton's developing talents, and also for England; they beat Northern Ireland 5-2, Luxembourg 9-0 (Charlton scoring three), Spain 4-2, Wales 5-1 (Charlton one), Scotland 9-3 and Mexico 8-0 (Charlton three more).

In truth, Winterbottom's England peaked too soon. By the time they arrived in Chile for the 1962 World Cup, the spark had gone. Brazil were far too good in the quarter-finals though the ultimate outcome was providential for England and Charlton. Winterbottom resigned to concentrate on his own preferred task of national coaching director and Alf Ramsey was appointed.

The rest is history. Only two players – Bobby Moore and Gordon Banks – played more games for Ramsey's England than Charlton, as he became the new man to build an attack around. His goals in 1966 took the Three Lions through to the dramatic showdown with West Germany.



United legend... Charlton lifts the 1968 European Cup

The final itself, won in extra-time, was not Charlton's finest display. He and Franz Beckenbauer had tracked each other out of the game but that sacrifice was probably to England's advantage. Charlton broke down in tears of relief, exhaustion and delight at referee Gottfried Dienst's final whistle.

Four years later in Leon, Mexico, it was Beckenbauer who won their personal duel. Holders England seized a two-goal lead before losing 3-2 to the Germans in quarter-final extra-time. Beckenbauer had just pulled the Germans back into the game at 2-1 when Ramsey decided to substitute Charlton and bring on Colin Bell's fresh legs. The Germans were energised by the sight of Charlton's departure from what proved to be his final game in a national shirt; at 32 he called a halt to his England career.

By the time he had settled into an honoured directorship at United, Charlton could look back with his own modest pride on a host of awards at home and abroad including an OBE in 1969, a CBE in 1974 and then a knighthood in 1994. He was a goodwill ambassador for UNICEF and generous with his time for cancer charities and other causes.

In simple, factual terms, many footballers have achieved more in their accumulation of trophies and titles, honours and money. But, as every fan knows, the beautiful game encompasses far more in passion and emotion.

"It's romance not profit that sticks in the memory," Charlton told this writer, looking back on his career. "For me, the pinnacle was winning the European Cup in 1968. It was such an emotional achievement, for Sir Matt in particular, because of what had happened to the club and so many of his players at Munich."

In an era when the word "great" is lazily over-used, the accolade in sport is appropriate for men and women whose achievements are magnified by a personal stature which outstrips the narrow confines of their own professional discipline: Bobby Charlton was one such footballer, one such man.

Surviving tragedy ...Charlton recovers in hospital after the Munich air disaster

Brothers...Bobby and Jack Charlton line up at Wembley in 1965

Ajax

Dutch giants are in disarray with one crisis following another

Ajax are turning back the clock 30 years after hitting an historic rock bottom. In an attempt to solve the enormous crisis at the club, Louis van Gaal and Michael van Praag have been asked to play their part in reviving the Amsterdam giants.

Van Gaal as head coach and Van Praag as chairman were highly successful during the 1990s, leading the Amsterdammers to the top of the club game, clinching the 1992 UEFA Cup and, of course, the 1995 Champions League. Those were the good old days that Ajax and their supporters can now only dream of.

The 72-year-old Van Gaal, who retired after leaving the Netherlands national team following the World Cup last year, will be an advisor to the supervisory board. Many hoped he would accept a more leading role, but he declined, stating that he is mostly living in Portugal and wouldn't be able to make enough time.

"But my life in Portugal can be combined with my role as an external advisor," he said. "I am willing to offer my football knowledge to the supervisory board, especially when Michael van Praag is appointed."

Van Praag was expected to be appointed at a general shareholders meeting on November 17. But how ever the new leadership team shapes up, one thing is for sure: the current state at Ajax is a mess.

Technical director Sven Mislintat was sacked within a few months, new coach Maurice Steijn soon followed him, hooligans forced the abandonment of the match against arch-rivals Feyenoord and, when Ajax were thrashed 5-2 by PSV at the end of October, they were sitting rock bottom of the Eredivisie table, something that had never happened before in the club's history.

What is happening now is a consequence of the bad decisions of the past. Last season, head coach Alfred Schreuder was sacked, while interim coach John Heitinga was also ditched after Ajax failed to qualify for the Champions League for the first time since 2010.

The man brought in to try to help solve the problems was new director of football Sven Mislintat, but the German's only contribution in a limited timeframe was to spend over €100 million on almost an entirely new team, before being undermined by the man he hired. Steijn said he had "not zero, but little" influence on the players signed by the club, though he dismissed rumours of any rift between the pair.

Things took a controversial turn when Dutch broadcaster *NOS* revealed that the €8m transfer of Croatia left-back Borna Sosa, a last-minute arrival from Stuttgart, was closed by AKA Global, a company that acquired shares in Mislintat's company Matchmetrics, a commercial data system for scouting football players. Mislintat recently became the main shareholder with 35 per cent of the stocks – a particularly sensitive matter since Ajax are on the stock market.

At first, Ajax opted to leave him in charge, waiting for the outcome of the investigation. An official statement said: "The club decided to take a closer look at the matter and is being assisted by external advisors. There will also be an independent external investigation done by a forensic accountant. Sven Mislintat has declared that he will fully cooperate, which includes sharing all relevant documentation."

> How ever the new leadership team shapes up, one thing is for sure: the current state at Ajax is a mess

That decision, on the eve of the match against Feyenoord, wouldn't stand for long. The traumatic events surrounding that match proved to be the straw that broke the camel's back. Minutes after the game was abandoned and with the club in total disarray, Mislintat was given his marching orders.

Crisis...Ajax v Feyenoord is abandoned after fans throw flares onto the pitch

The pluck of champions and arch-rivals Feyenoord merely accentuated Ajax's misery. They had raced into a 3-0 first-half lead when, shortly before half-time, hooligans deliberately threw flares onto the pitch knowing that the game would be interrupted. Soon after the restart, more flares where thrown, meaning the game was abandoned. The situation was followed by hooligans breaking through the main entrance and causing all kinds of damage.

That match painfully showed that Ajax do not have their house in order – on or off the pitch. Like at several other Dutch clubs, a group of new hooligans are taking football hostage.

With Mislintat gone, Steijn was soon to follow. The former Sparta Rotterdam coach could never quite shake off the notion that leading a top club was above his head – something many pundits had warned of before his summer appointment.

Back at Ajax... Louis van Gaal

Steijn never found the right starting line-up and constantly shifted players around. Perhaps the best example is Gaston Avila, the Argentinian left-back who won the Belgian league title last year with Antwerp. In Amsterdam he was switched from left-back to the bench, then to central defence. While Jorrel Hato, a 17-year-old mega talent, and one of Ajax's few bright lights this season, had to give up his central defensive berth for the left-back spot.

In the end, the 4-3 defeat away to then-bottom club FC Utrecht was his last game. With assistant Hedwiges Maduro installed as caretaker coach, Ajax are looking for a real solution. Former Greece national team coach John van 't Schip will take over, but probably only as an interim.

The club will leave the final decision to Alex Kroes, Ajax's new general manager. He left AZ last summer but can only start his new role in March 2024 as AZ are blocking an earlier date because of a non-competition clause. Considering the current chaos at the Johan Cruyff Arena, his arrival can't come soon enough. Until then, Ajax will have to make the best of a bad situation.

Klaas-Jan Droppert

Amine Gouiri

French-born forward switches international allegiance to Algeria on eve of AFCON 2023

January 2024 marks the 20th anniversary of the major change to eligibility rules for international players that offered the possibility for those previously capped by one country at youth level to play for another at senior level. It was a change that set off many tugs of the heart over the head – or vice versa – in the intervening years, and the latest player to make a decision on his national team future is the 23-year-old Amine Gouiri.

There had been months of speculation over whether he would stick with France, where a future spot with *Les Bleus* looked a real possibility given his rapid development through the junior ranks, or switch to Algeria, who had been courting him for some while. France have lost many players to Algeria, and vice versa, and Gouiri's decision has not gone down well, particularly because it took so long and left so many people waiting.

The Rennes attacker had scored 12 goals in 31 appearances for the French Under-21 side and made a major impression while still a teenager in Ligue 1, debuting at Lyon before a €7 million move to Nice when he was only 20. Last season there was further confirmation of his talent as his 15 league goals saw Rennes finish fourth and grab a place in the Europa League.

It was on the eve of the Europa League match at Villarreal that Gouiri announced he would be switching allegiance and declaring for the Algerian national team. Settling the matter had become an urgent issue as Gouiri's form rapidly declined. At that point, he had scored only one goal all season, and none since the opening day of Ligue 1.

"I don't want to make excuses but, yes, after [the] announcement I felt it freed me," he said. "It's a good thing it's now done, I can move forward peacefully and concentrate on Rennes." Sure enough, his next three games brought two goals and an assist.

Algeria were delighted, especially as they look ahead to the Cup of Nations finals, and did not hesitate to draft him into their team, handing him his debut in a 5-1 friendly win at home to the Cape Verde Islands in October. He didn't get on the scoresheet in that game, nor in his second appearance against Egypt four days later, but did show plenty of promise, particularly in his partnership with Riyad Mahrez.

"Gouiri can play in three different positions – as a No.9, as a left-winger or as a second striker," said Fennec Foxes head coach Djamel Belmadi. "I think that where he is best is as a second attacker, where he likes to pick up and play with the ball."

The 2019 African champions have had setbacks since winning the title in Egypt, crashing out in defence of their crown with an embarrassing loss to Equatorial Guinea at the last competition in Cameroon and then also missing out on the World Cup in Qatar in a last-gasp setback. Belmadi's side has been in need of a boost and Gouiri's defection has certainly handed them that.

"My objectives with the national team are to help it go higher and win titles," the forward said. "I have no pressure, I will play as I usually do and I think everything will be fine."

Mark Gleeson

French youth star... Gouiri won over 70 caps for *Les Blues'* junior teams

> "My objectives with the national team are to help it go higher and win titles"
>
> Amine Gouiri on his Algeria switch

eyewitness

Mark Gleeson reports

MOROCCO

Prime location

How Morocco became the destination of choice for African football

It has been long in the making and cost hundreds of millions in investment, but Morocco have turned their previous pariah status on the African continent into a powerful position of control, topped by finally earning the right to host the World Cup after decades of trying. They are also to stage the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations finals, winning hands down in battle with neighbours Algeria and scoring a public relations coup in the process.

The timing of FIFA's decision to award the hosting of the 2030 World Cup to Morocco, Portugal and Spain caught everyone off guard, but will prove part of a wider Machiavellian compromise that allows some early games to be played in South America – on the 100th anniversary of the first World Cup in Uruguay – and sets up the chance for FIFA to steer the 2034 finals to Saudi Arabia and get to tap deeper into their sudden appetite for sports investment.

The decision on the 2030 World Cup was supposed to be voted on by FIFA's member associations at next May's congress in Bangkok, where now they will be asked to rubber stamp the decision made in October by the FIFA Council.

Morocco have waited a long time for the opportunity having been defeated in all their previous bids, suffering disappointing setbacks in close-run affairs.

They first attempted for the 1994 finals but lost by three votes to the United States. Those were the days when the hosting decision was the preserve of the powerful FIFA executive committee.

All aboard...Morocco's national team parades through Rabat after the 2022 World Cup

In the 1998 process, they were pitted against France, England, Germany and Switzerland but, after all the other European candidates withdrew, France overcame Morocco 12-7.

The North African kingdom were close again in 2010 when rotation of hosting rights among the confederations was introduced to ensure an African World Cup, but South Africa emerged victors in the vote.

Last time out, Morocco never stood much chance when making their latest bid, this time against Canada, Mexico and the United States for the first 48-team World Cup in 2026. It was decided by a vote of the FIFA Congress in Moscow in 2018 and ended 134 votes to 65 against them.

Pointedly, some African countries voted for the North Americans in a protest against Morocco's long-time annexation of the former Spanish Sahara and it is this thorny issue that previously left them political pariahs on the continent. Shortly after Spain gave up control of the territory in 1975, both Mauritania and Morocco occupied and annexed it between themselves with Mauritania giving up their part to Morocco in 1979, who have controlled it ever since.

It meant that for decades Morocco was a political outsider, without membership of the continent's collective political body – the Organisation of African Unity (later called the African Union). Many African countries recognise the Polisario liberation movement, based in Algeria, as the legitimate government of Western Sahara but that support has been quietly tempered by a diplomatic seduction of the continent and the issue is rarely raised in international forums.

One of the tools of Moroccan realpolitik since re-joining the African Union in 2017 has been football.

Proven hosts... Morocco has staged a number of major events, including the 2022 African Champions league final in Casablanca

First, they signed agreements with many of the continent's poorer football associations, which offered material assistance, coaches and facilities. They now total 45 different partnerships. When FIFA and the Confederation of African Football (CAF) banned many countries from hosting international games because of their poor facilities, Morocco stepped in to offer their stadia, free of charge. That continues.

The Royal Moroccan Football Federation's seemingly limitless resources also fund many of

ABOVE and LEFT: On the map...the World Cup performances of Morocco's men and women's teams helped boost the country's football profile

African football's activities, further winning over hearts and minds.

It started once the veteran CAF president Issa Hayatou was voted out of power and his successor, Ahmad of Madagascar, needed help realising his grandiose plans. They began with a massive seminar on the future of the African game in Rabat and paid for by the host nation, quickly elevating Morocco football boss Fouzi Lekjaa to a powerful place in the CAF executive, where he continues to flex his muscle, often to the irritation of current CAF president Patrice Motsepe.

But with limited resources, CAF have been major benefactors of the Moroccan largesse. They stepped in to host the Africa Under-23 Cup of Nations earlier this year, the Women's Africa Cup of Nations finals in 2022, the 2021 African Under-17 Championship (later cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic) and last year's African Women's Champions League final. In the three years between 2020 and 2022 (when the African Champions League final was played as a single match, rather than home and away over two legs) Casablanca hosted two of the three deciders. Of course, many of these tournaments came at great benefit to the Moroccans, like a first-ever qualification for the Women's World Cup and a place at the men's tournament at the Paris Olympics next year, but they have come to CAF's rescue time and again, carving out a prominent role at the same time.

Morocco will also host the Africa Cup of Nations in 2025, replacing Guinea after they were stripped of the right to host the tournament last year. Morocco won by default after Algeria, Zambia and a joint-bid from Nigeria and Benin all withdrew before the CAF executive committee voted at their September meeting in Cairo.

Algeria sensed they were going to lose and pulled out on the eve of the vote to avoid the diplomatic embarrassment, claiming they were "motivated by a new approach to the football development strategy in Algeria" and would "focus efforts on the reorganisation and revitalisation of football in Algeria, as it reiterates its unwavering commitment to the development of African football".

The neighbours have a strained relationship, both at political and sporting level, with football often an arena for public point-scoring – as was the case at the last African Nations Championship when Morocco refused to send their team in a row over landing rights for their national airline. The 1,427km border between the two countries has been closed for the last 30 years.

The Moroccans have come to CAF's rescue time and again, carving out a prominent role at the same time

The 2025 AFCON finals will be only the second time that Morocco host Africa's most popular sporting event, almost four decades after the last time in 1988. Morocco were supposed to have hosted the 2015 Cup of Nations finals but pulled out amid concerns over the spread of the Ebola virus in West Africa. It was a decision vigorously condemned at the time by Hayatou, who banned Morocco from the next two AFCON finals – a decision later overturned by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS).

For 2025 they have proposed using six stadiums, in Agadir, Casablanca, Fez, Marrakesh, Rabat and Tangier.

For 2030 they still have to sort out how many games are held in Morocco and whether the North Africans gets the final, as Lekjaa has already claimed. Madrid is a much more likely alternative but the Moroccans are pushing hard to avoiding being only a bit-part player amid the trio of hosts, as is the case with Canada and Mexico in 2026.

There are plans for a new stadium with a capacity of over 100,000 spectators – the largest in Africa – in El Mansouria, 35km from Casablanca and, if this is confirmed, the size will strengthen their case. Reports have suggested Spain would host six groups in the first round, while Portugal and Morocco would host three each. The rest of the schedule is still very much up for grabs.

It was only in March, at the FIFA Congress in Kigali, that it was announced that Morocco would add to the Spain and Portugal bid. Spain and Morocco have had a rapprochement over the Western Sahara affair and it was at the highest government levels that Morocco was invited to join with the Iberian neighbours, significantly strengthening their bid.

It obviously helped that Morocco had beaten both Spain and Portugal at the World Cup in Qatar late last year on their way to becoming the first African, and Arab, country to get as far as the World Cup semi-finals. The new-found pedigree of the Moroccan team made even more sense for the invitation but the real reason was that Morocco would have been expected to get a large bloc of the African votes and together with European support for Portugal and Spain, their bid would have been unbeatable at any vote of the FIFA Congress. In the end, though, that was unnecessary.

All three countries have large-scale tourist infrastructure with Morocco rapidly growing as a fancied destination. They are also a country with a strong security apparatus, taking a heavy line against Islamist extremism, with a pro-Western outlook. The 2025 Cup of Nations should prove a good test event but then Morocco have already hosted the Club World Cup in 2013, 2014 and again last year and are therefore well-tuned to FIFA's demanding agenda.

Key figure...Fouzi Lekjaa, president of the Royal Moroccan Football Federation

eyewitness

Samindra Kunti reports

SAUDI ARABIA

A brave new world

Saudi Arabia's takeover of world football continues apace with the upcoming FIFA Club World Cup

All roads lead to Saudi Arabia, at least in football. Manchester City, maiden UEFA Champions League winners after a 1-0 victory over Internazionale, will travel to Jeddah in December as favourites to win the 2023 Club World Cup and cement Europe's dominance of the club game in a tournament that marks the end of the competition's current flawed format as well as a watershed moment in Saudi Arabia's booming influence in the sport.

Up for grabs... the Club World Cup trophy

Brazil's Corinthians were the last non-European club to claim the Club World Cup, but that narrow victory over Chelsea in 2012 – based on the tactical acumen and organisation of manager Tite and the enthusiasm of a huge travelling party in Yokohama – feels like a distant memory. That year, a single second-half goal by striker Paolo Guerrero proved to be the difference between the two clubs in a David-v-Goliath contest but, since then, the final of the Club World Cup has too often been a one-sided and predictable affair with the Europeans, including a quintet of Real Madrid triumphs, prevailing.

Much has to do with the economic imperatives of the game. The UEFA Champions League remains the centre of gravity in the club game with riches and revenue on offer that no other competition can match. City serve as the perfect illustration: a superclub built on the wealth of a Gulf State. They are, at least according to *Deloitte*, the richest club in the world.

The English champions, managed by the finest coach of his generation and led by an unstoppable goalscoring machine, swept to the Champions League in dominant fashion. In the second leg of the semi-finals, they produced arguably the best-ever knockout performance by an English club in continental competition to blow away European grandee ▸

Club World Cup final host...Jeddah's King Abdullah Sports City

and Club World Cup holders Real Madrid. The final against Inter was less dramatic but delivered the European success the club had so craved. Pep Guardiola now has his sights set on adding the world crown to the European one, just as he did with Barcelona in both 2009 and 2011. Instead of Lionel Messi leading his attack, it's now Erling Haaland – an altogether different type of player, but just as devastatingly effective.

What is the rest of the world supposed to do against such a determined and finely tuned machine? Spoiler alert: not much.

As winners of the OFC (Oceania Football Confederation) Champions League and as a semi-final professional club, Auckland City will once again be the most modest outfit to participate in the competition. The Kiwi club claimed bronze in 2014 and have appeared at five of the last eight finals, but without winning a game, while Oceania's three other representatives have also failed to progress beyond the first round in that time. In an attempt to give the club game a boost across the region, the OFC and FIFA have plans for a version of the Super League, the OFC Pro League, although that won't begin until at least 2025.

Asian champions... Urawa Reds of Japan

Taking on Auckland City will be Al Ittihad, representing the hosts as Saudi champions and one of four clubs in the Arab Kingdom that was nationalised as part of the country's expansionist football vision. Owned 75 per cent by the Public Investment Fund and with a squad starring Fabinho, N'Golo Kante and Karim Benzema, they will expect to reach the second round and a clash with African champions Al Ahly, who finished fourth in the 2022 edition. The winner of that tie will advance to play South America's representatives, Copa Libertadores winners Fluminense.

The Club World Cup represents a massive moment in the South American football calendar, providing an opportunity to win a global crown, defeat the Europeans, earn local bragging rights and please the supporters. The attitude and excitement are very different from Europe where the tournament is viewed as a nuisance, an infringement on the domestic calendar. In contrast, the South American build-up to the tournament and potential final is huge, with non-stop media coverage and fans splashing out to follow their club thousands of miles, although it has often ended in disappointment. In Morocco last time out, Flamengo were beaten in the last

Holders...Real Madrid became the tenth consecutive European winner in last season's competition

four, a result that ultimately led to the exit of manager Vitor Pereira. In 2019, the Rio club pushed Liverpool to extra-time in the final, before falling to a 99th-minute strike from Roberto Firmino.

Fluminense will enter the tournament at the semi-final stage, where they will meet either Auckland, Al Ittihad or Al Ahly, while Manchester City will take on either CONCACAF champions Leon or Asian Champions League winners Urawa Red Diamonds at the same stage. The Brazilians will be favourites for their tie, but the step up to City's sheer class in the likeliest final will be huge.

In many ways, Manchester City prevailing would not just be a symbol of their recent rise and dominance, but of the direction, football is travelling in. In Jeddah, new worlds will merge: City represent unchecked wealth, nation-state interests and the multi-club ownership model. A disruptor of the club game as well, Saudi Arabia forms FIFA's new heartland.

The 2023 Club World Cup marks the end of the competition's current flawed format as well as a watershed moment in Saudi Arabia's booming influence in the sport

This is not the first FIFA tournament the Arab Kingdom will host. In 1997, Ronaldo and Romario dazzled their way to victory for Brazil at the 1997 Confederations Cup. However, context matters: the Club World Cup represents the Arab Kingdom's arrival on the FIFA football stage in a more tangible fashion. Last February, the FIFA Council awarded the tournament's hosting rights without much ado to Saudi Arabia. As one Council member put it: "They just presented the proposal and we approved. Simple as that. There was no discussion, no bidding, nothing."

Gianni Infantino previously hatched a grand plan for a 24-team Club World Cup in China, funded by SoftBank, a Japanese conglomerate with Saudi Arabian backers. In Jeddah, the Club World Cup will take place for the last time in its much-maligned seven-team format before morphing into an expanded tournament in 2025.

FIFA have long seen the riches of the Champions League and want to tap into the lucrative club game. To date, the World Cup remains the organisation's golden goose, but a prominent Club World Cup could open a second revenue stream. To this end, FIFA has quietly been working towards the creation of Super Leagues, but with limited success. The OFC Pro League remains a paper competition for now and the recently concluded African Football League had become a face-saving exercise, shorn of proper broadcast and sponsor interests. Visit Saudi is one of the few brands to attach its name to the African Football League with the tourism brand also sponsoring the 2022 Club World Cup.

FIFA's entente with Saudi Arabia, however, continues. It took a long detour via the ill-fated proposal of the Saudi Arabian Football Federation (SAFF) to stage a biennial World Cup, before manoeuvring behind the scenes to clear a pathway for an unchallenged Saudi bid for the 2034 World Cup.

After Qatar, Infantino and FIFA's pivot to Riyadh was predictable, but the fact that no questions were asked at the Council over the proposal to stage the Club World Cup in Saudi Arabia is telling of FIFA's leadership. Saudi Arabia staging FIFA tournaments should be a test of the organisation's human rights policies. Unfortunately, Infantino has embraced Saudi Arabia like never before.

All the investments in the sport and staging of the tournament – with the 2027 Asian Cup a next major milestone – will keep the limelight on the country and won't deflect attention from human rights abuses; if anything, it will shine a spotlight on them. FIFA supremo Infantino has nurtured a close relationship with Saudi Arabia, often visiting Riyadh and meeting with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who remains one of the most controversial and influential world leaders. And controversy will continue to surround Saudi Arabia because of the country's lamentable human rights record, discrimination of women and minorities, and the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

Brand Saudi Arabia is deeply flawed. The country "spends billions of dollars hosting major entertainment, cultural, and sporting events as a deliberate strategy to deflect from the country's image as a pervasive human rights violator" according to Human Rights Watch. The Kingdom, however, sees football as a projection of soft power that can help normalise external perceptions of Saudi Arabia as well as the perceptions of its younger population demanding modernisation. Football and sports play a key part in Vision 2030, a $7 trillion initiative to diversify the Saudi economy beyond oil. That's the PR line Saudi Arabia and FIFA will roll out in the decade to come, starting in Jeddah.

Favourites...City could win their fifth trophy of 2023 in Saudi Arabia

THE DRAW

FIRST ROUND

1. Dec 12 **Al Ittihad** v **Auckland City**

SECOND ROUND

2. Dec 15 **Al Ahly** v **Winner Match 1**

3. Dec 15 **Leon** v **Urawa Reds**

SEMI-FINALS

4. Dec 18 **Fluminense** v **Winner Match 2**

5. Dec 19 **Winner Match 3** v **Manchester City**

MATCH FOR THIRD PLACE

6. Dec 22 **Loser Match 5** v **Loser Match 4**

FINAL

7. Dec 22 **Winner Match 5** v **Winner Match 4**

eyewitness

Alec McQuarrie reports

BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA

A tale of two clubs

Mostar, the unofficial capital of Herzegovina, is a city divided by history, nationality, religion – and football

Derby day...players of HSK Zrinjski and FK Velez step out onto the pitch *Credit: HSK Zrinjski*

The Mostar derby is like no other. Despite an enforced hiatus between 1939 and 2000, this is a rivalry that means a lot more than mere bragging rights. The oldest derby in Bosnia and Herzegovina encapsulates a century of political, ethnic and religious division, set against a staggering backdrop of soaring mountains and lush greenery.

There was an added spice to the latest edition, after hosts HSK Zrinjski became the nation's first club to reach a European group stage. However, not everyone in Mostar was pleased by this pioneering feat, not least city rivals FK Velez.

One of their major grievances relates to the venue for their October encounter. The Bijeli Brijeg stadium was Velez's home during the club's glory years until they were evicted at the outbreak of the Bosnian War in 1992. But to understand their expulsion, you have to go back to the break-up of Yugoslavia, which began a year earlier.

"At the end of the day, Bosnia is very much in a frozen conflict rather than having had peace sorted out," explains Balkans football expert Richard Wilson.

Mostar is divided almost exactly in half, with mainly Catholic Croats in the west and Muslim Bosniaks in the east, but you might not know it from walking around the city today. The unofficial capital of Herzegovina offers clues, such as Croatian and Bosnian flags only flying in the west and east respectively.

Bullet holes streak bombed out husks of abandoned buildings, and construction work whirrs around every street corner. It is said that around 70 per cent of all property was heavily or entirely destroyed in the Bosnian War, making Mostar the worst affected area in the country.

During the civil conflict, former friends and neighbours became enemies almost overnight; Croat and Bosniak forces came together to break the Serbian siege in 1992, and then turned on each other.

Intense fighting culminated in the famous Old Bridge – or *Stari Most*, from which Mostar gets its name – collapsing into the Neretva River after standing for 427 years. It took more than a decade for the iconic structure to be rebuilt brick-by-brick, and it has come to symbolise peace and reconciliation between the two halves of the city.

Unfortunately for Velez and their fans, their former stadium is located deep inside Bosnian-Croat territory. Even worse for them, their forgotten enemy, Zrinjski, were re-established 47 years after being banished. Having participated in the football league run by the Ustase regime during World War II, Zrinjski were at the mercy of the newly-formed

ABOVE: A tale of two clubs...players of HSK Zrinjski and FK Velez clash during the most recent Mostar derby
Credit: HSK Zrinjski

LEFT: Unlikely hero... Slobodan Jakovljevic heads towards goal
Credit: HSK Zrinjski

Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia.

"After 1945, any club that was seen to have nationalist connotations by the new government was basically wiped from existence," explains Wilson. "Depending on how much they disliked the club, their records were straight up burned." This included HSK Zrinjski, who saw over 40 years of history go up in smoke.

In the meantime, a multi-ethnic Velez became a force to be reckoned with in the Yugoslav First League and on the European stage. In 1974, the *Rodeni* (the Born) stunned eventual English champions Derby County 5-4 in the last 16 of the UEFA Cup, while the likes of Borussia Dortmund, Spartak Moscow and Rapid Vienna were all defeated at the Bijeli Brijeg in the 1970s and '80s.

But times have changed. Zrinjski took over Bijeli Brijeg in 1992 and remain there to this day. Thousands of Velez's Croat supporters switched allegiances. An 18-year-old Luka Modric made his senior career debut at Zrinjski and duly won the league's Player of the Year award in 2004. A season later, the club clinched their first title on their 100-year anniversary.

Zrinjski captain... Nemanja Bilbija heads towards goal during October's derby
Credit: HSK Zrinjski

And while the *Plemici* (the Nobles) have been making up for lost time in the new Premijer Liga, Velez have been stuck in reverse. The two-time Yugoslav Cup winners have been relegated twice, are yet to win a league match at their former home, and Zrinjski have picked up a record eight championships in the interim.

"Zrinjski's recent dominance has to do with planning more than anything," says Wilson. "In 2019, just before COVID, they sat down and said: 'What are we going to do in these next five years?' And everything has been building and building towards that."

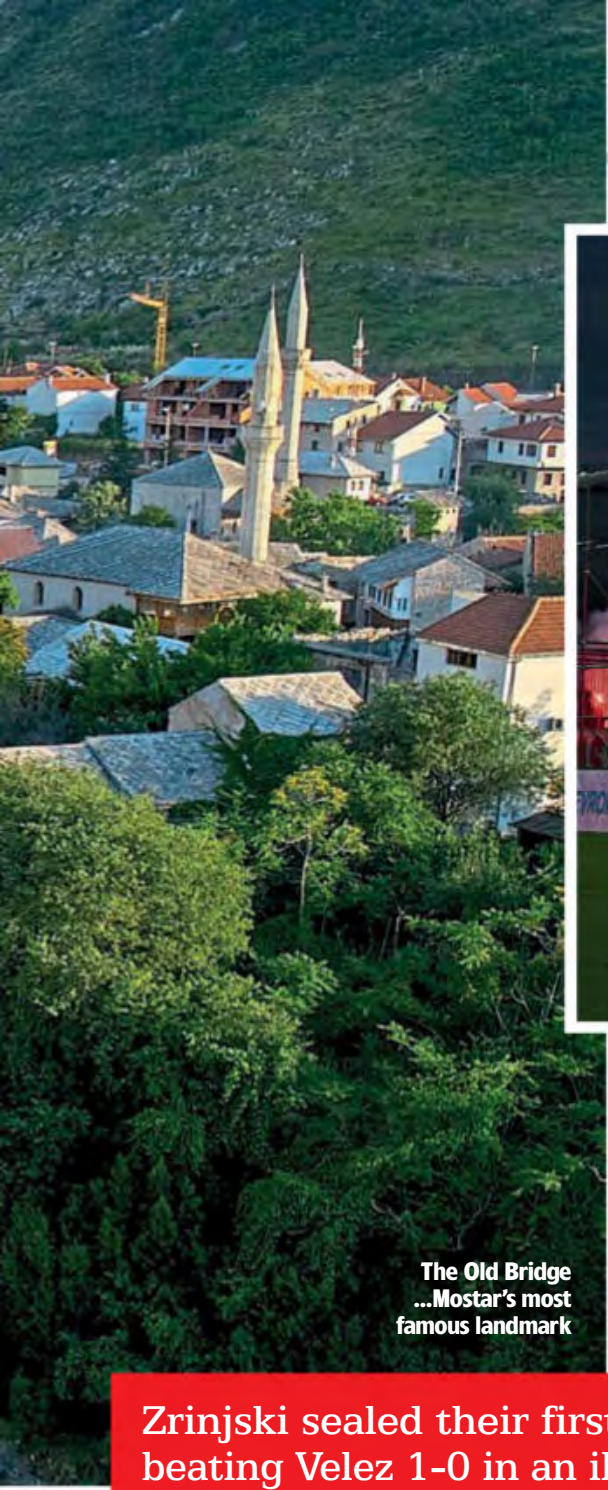
Their latest success was the sweetest yet: Zrinjski sealed their first domestic double by beating Velez 1-0 in an ill-tempered Bosnian Cup final in May.

Before the game, Zrinjski ultras turned their back when the national anthem was played, and the match was stopped in the second half when Velez's Red Army set off an arsenal of pyrotechnics. Referee Luka Bilbija then brandished five red cards when a mass brawl broke out after the final whistle.

An equally fiery derby was expected when the clubs met for the first time this season in mid-October. Zrinjski ultras revealed they had captured a Velez Red Army banner and burned it shortly after kick-off, much to the delight of the towering, double-tiered west stand. Built into a hill overlooking the Neretva River valley, the stadium resembles an ancient Greek amphitheatre. And given the quality of football on show, it is the unrelenting Ultras Mostar that take centre stage on the opposing terrace, with co-ordinated flare routines, call-and-response refrains, and even catapulted red fireworks.

But, as Zrinjski's content manager Marko Boras acknowledges, the club have bigger fish to fry this season.

"Obviously we're very excited about the European games now, but it's only through the domestic competition that you can reach it again next year" says Boras. "We prepare for this match just like every other. But of course, it has a much bigger meaning for the fanbase, the whole city and for the other club.



The Old Bridge ...Mostar's most famous landmark

Ultras Mostar... supporters of Zrinjski make their presence felt inside the Bijeli Brijeg stadium
Credit: HSK Zrinjski

Zrinjski sealed their first domestic double by beating Velez 1-0 in an ill-tempered Bosnian Cup final in May…Referee Luka Bilbija brandished five red cards when a mass brawl broke out after the final whistle

The town's reputation is in question."

The club even decided to postpone their first three league games to focus fully on the lucrative European qualifiers that began in early July. Victories over Urartu of Armenia and Breidablik from Iceland ensured Europa Conference League group stage qualification and a €2.9 million windfall.

With limited investment in the Premijer Liga, this sort of money is season-defining, not least because it gives Zrinjski at least six group-stage games to potentially earn a cool €500,000 win bonus. That looked like a lost cause in their first match though, as they went into the half-time break trailing last season's semi-finalists AZ Alkmaar 3-0.

"The atmosphere was very positive even though we were losing. The fans were making jokes that we didn't come for the result, but just to have fun," recalls Boras. "And then it started."

A direct free-kick from Zvonimir Kozulj caught out Mat Ryan in the 48th minute to give the hosts hope. Josip Corluka's overhit cross looped over the Australian shortly after, and Aldin Hrvanovic's piledriver brought Zrinjski level with 20 minutes to play. Shirt off, the Bosnian wheeled away in ecstasy, but the best was yet to come. Kozulj completed the comeback he had started by tapping home a rebound in the 81st minute. Cue mayhem in the west stand.

"That was history for the whole country, for the city, for the club," insists Boras. "The atmosphere was crazy. That night ranks number one in the history of Zrinjski. It was an historic promotion of our club and city."

At the derby a month later, Zrinjski put in their most accomplished performance since they reacquainted with their neighbours at the beginning of the millennium. A rare brace from stalwart Serbian centre-back Slobodan Jakovljevic made it 3-0 by half-time, after Mario Cuze had headed in an early free-kick. That's how it finished at Bijeli Brijeg, confirming Zrinjski's biggest league win over Velez since July 1931.

And, despite the overt show of hostilities between the sets of fans during the match – one popular Zrinjski chant goes along the lines of: "Kill, kill, let them run away, Red Army into the underworld!" – plus the hangover from last season's cup final, there was no sign of trouble anywhere in the city. Mostar seems a place tired of conflict and determined to move on.

"I think the media and foreigners want to make it seem worse than it really is," says one Velez fan. "We're normal here, like you can see."

Boras agrees: "In terms of the relationship between the two clubs, we're in good contact. The day before, we had the press conference in the city hall. We always do it together. It's an act of showing respect and you can see that when the players and coaches talk about each other. At the end of the day, all of them live in the same town."

Red Army Mostar... Velez supporters
Credit: HSK Zrinjski

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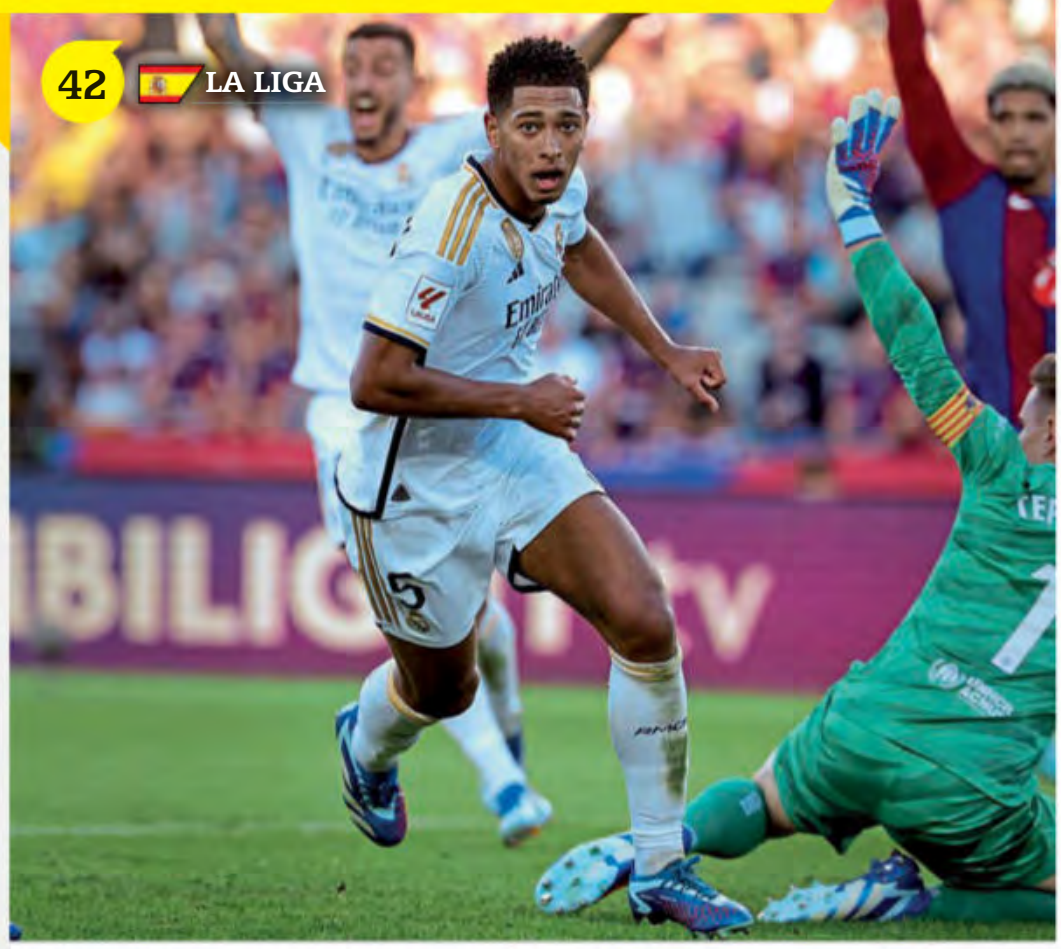
2023-24 SEASON UPDATE

With Europe's top five leagues now well underway, our network of correspondents pose the big questions and help tackle the major talking points of the season so far

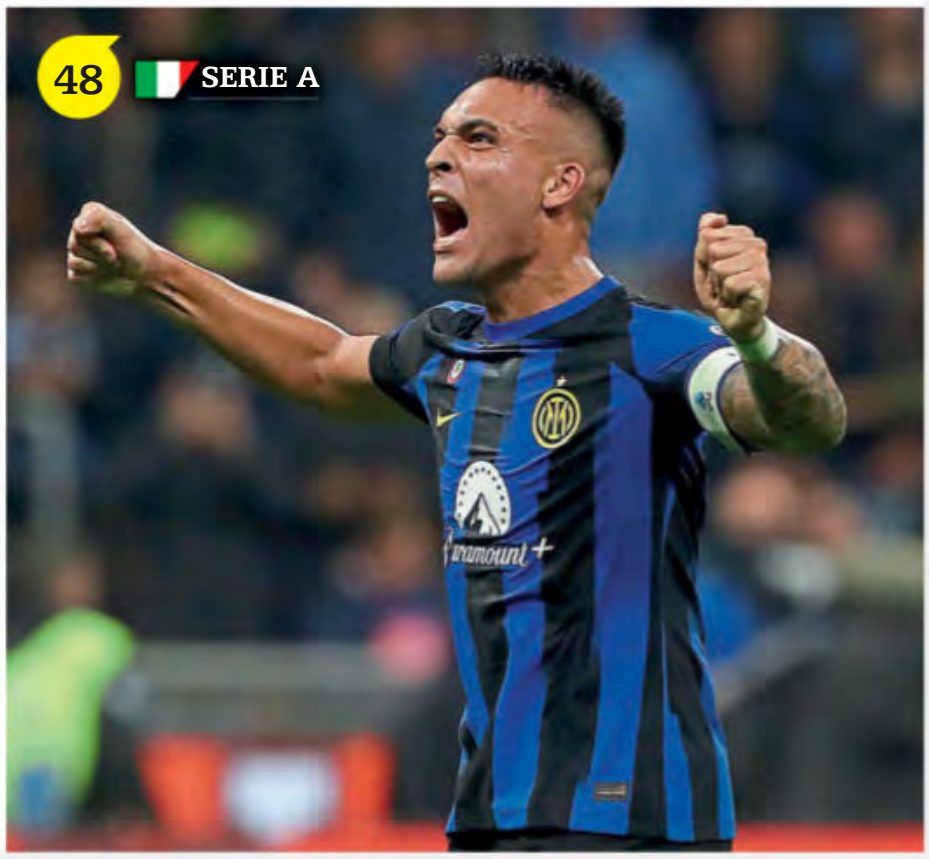
40 PREMIER LEAGUE



42 LA LIGA

44 BUNDESLIGA

46 LIGUE 1



48 SERIE A

Premier League update

Attacking duo... Maddison and Son have dovetailed effectively

How far can "Ange-ball" take Spurs?
A long way. Spirit is vastly underestimated as a factor in fashioning a successful football team, and this is where the human intelligence of new Spurs boss Ange Postecoglou is so impressive – alongside his tactical acumen and unwillingness to compromise on his principles. His approach is to create a Tottenham team that is worth significantly more than the sum of its parts.

Many Spurs supporters were sceptical when he arrived, a low-key appointment following some superstar managers. The reaction was remarkably similar to that of Leicester City fans when Claudio Ranieri turned up there. Winning a league title in his first season is probably beyond Postecoglou, but he has already achieved a significant triumph in restoring the joy and hope to the Tottenham atmosphere.

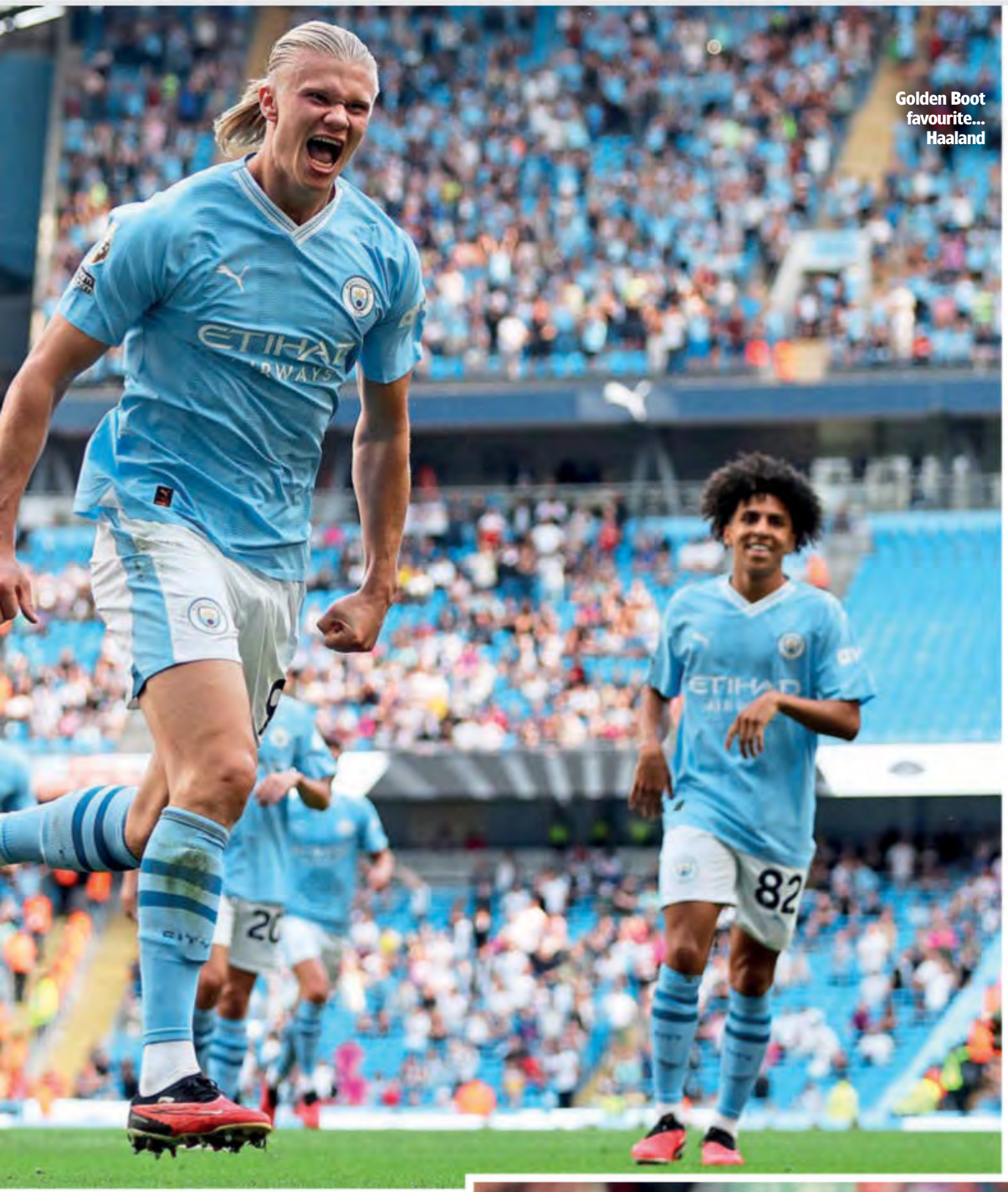
His other early challenge, replacing Harry Kane, also appears to have been managed successfully with new signing James Maddison effectively dovetailing with Son Heung-min. With the Korean leading the line ahead of a free-roaming Maddison, Tottenham have an attack of pace, energy, craft and quality.

What next for Manchester United?
More months of strife. How can it be anything else while the Glazer family remain in control at Old Trafford? The never-ending saga of will-they-won't-they sell the club has clearly had a negative impact on the team's on-field performances. Fans are disenchanted, the players look uncertain, the stadium is decaying, and Erik ten Hag has struggled to inspire a revival.

It cannot help the dressing room for the manager to have had a very public falling out with £73 million signing Jadon Sancho, and this issue is a vivid symbol of the wider discontent. An injection of new voices and new ideas is badly needed in the boardroom, and probably in the dugout as well. Much more likely is that the mediocre status quo will ruin another season as the Glazers dither and the supporters' noisy protests are ignored as an irrelevance.

Are Liverpool title contenders again?
You'd be a fool to doubt it. Jurgen Klopp has successfully rejuvenated his squad with some great signings in midfield. The money spent on the energetic and skilful Dominik Szoboszlai and Alexis Mac Allister has paid off handsomely, and a mood of optimism and impregnability has returned to Anfield after a rare lean year under

More strife...it's been a miserable season so far for Manchester United


Golden Boot favourite... Haaland

their German manager. Liverpool have a world-class goalkeeper in Alisson, and confidence is returning in defence.

The danger will come in January when Mohamed Salah departs. The Egyptian will definitely be away for AFCON 2023, while the fear remains that he could depart permanently to the riches of the Saudi Pro League in the winter transfer window. Salah remains the talisman of the team, a prolific scorer whose aura in the Premier League would be almost impossible to replace in mid-season.

> A mood of optimism and impregnability has returned to Anfield after a rare lean year under their German manager

Liverpool are not the only rivals to defending champions Manchester City in this campaign, though. Arsenal's excellence is undimmed from last season, the aforementioned Tottenham now look a force to be reckoned with, while Newcastle and Aston Villa both appear equipped to be competitive through the slog of 38 matches. It is a sign of the unequalled strength in depth of the Premier League.

Contenders again...Liverpool are rejuvenated this season

Can anyone keep up with Erling Haaland in the Golden Boot race?
You'd have to say that Haaland remains a strong favourite to capture the Golden Boot for a second consecutive season in the Premier League. After all, when a Pep Guardiola team is designed to deliver chances for you, the odds are in your favour. There was a period at the start of the season when Haaland was spurning relatively simple chances, but even a superhuman goalscorer must have a blip now and then. There are other contenders though, particularly Salah at Liverpool, while Son will continue to fire as long as Maddison keeps loading the bullets for him.

Other names in the frame could be Ollie Watkins, the spearhead of Aston Villa's revival under coach Unai Emery, and Alexander Isak, flourishing in his second season at Newcastle in a team that creates a ton of chances – although he does have to share those chances with Callum Wilson. Similarly, Julian Alvarez would also surely be high up the list of scorers if he wasn't in the same side as Haaland.

What's the future for VAR?
For many, the best solution is to do away with VAR altogether – believing football is hugely worse off for its arrival – and to use technology purely for assessing whether a ball has crossed the goal-line. The inconsistency of its implementation and subsequent in-game delays during the forensic decision-making process is a particular sore point for many players, managers, supporters and pundits – something especially highlighted amid the ferocious pace of the Premier League.

The most damaging aspect, often under-appreciated, is that players and spectators cannot celebrate goals properly as VAR officials agonise about a marginal and subjective on-field refereeing decision.

Using VAR has opened a Pandora's Box of nonsense, the clearest example being Jurgen Klopp's risible request for an entire match to be replayed because confusion among officials meant Liverpool's "goal" against Tottenham was incorrectly ruled out for offside.

VAR will not be abandoned, the authorities will continue to tinker with its operation – likely without much effect – and Premier League managers will never stop moaning about referees.

La Liga update

Can Girona continue their impressive start to the season?
Girona won 31 points from their first 12 matches, making this their best-ever start to a La Liga season. At the beginning of November they sat top of the table, two points above Real Madrid – the only team to have beaten the Catalans – despite the summer departures of Oriol Romeu (Barcelona) and last season's top scorer Taty Castellanos (Lazio).

Their impressive recruitment, assisted by the scouting resources of the City Football Group, has provided manager Michel with an even stronger squad than the one that saw them just miss out on European qualification in 2022-23.

Free transfer Daley Blind (Bayern Munich) and loan signing Eric Garcia (Barcelona) are ball-playing defenders who are well suited to the side's build-from-the-back style, while returning Manchester City loanee Yan Couto is sharing minutes with the equally impressive young right-back Arnau Martinez. The 19-year-old winger Savio – or "Savinho" – has been a revelation on loan from fellow CFG club Troyes, Aleix Garcia has stepped up in Romeu's absence and striker Artem Dovbyk looks set to be another hit from the Ukrainian league following the January arrival of winger Viktor Tsygankov.

Their incredible form has been no fluke, with their chance creation and expected goals stats confirming they are an attacking force to be reckoned with. The early signs suggest that they are more than capable of finishing at least among the top six and sealing European football for the first time in the club's history.

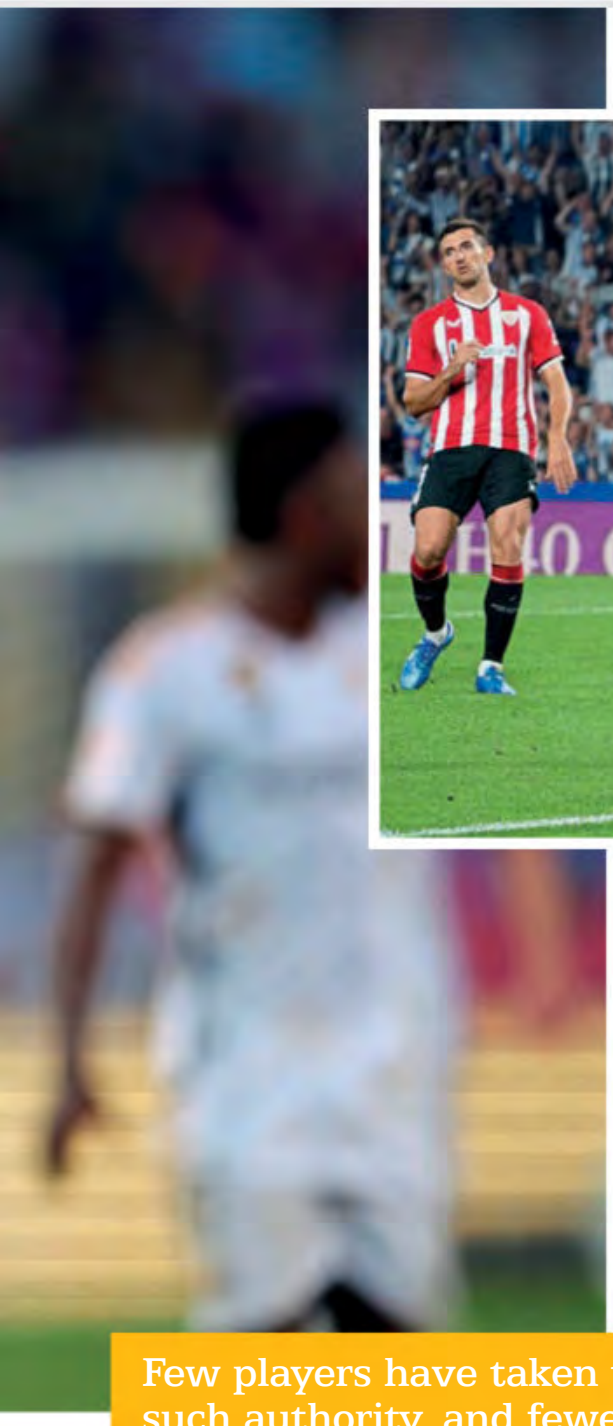
Real icon... Bellingham celebrates his late winner v Barcelona

Impressive... Girona have enjoyed their best-ever La Liga start

Are Real Madrid over-reliant on Jude Bellingham?
It was recently pointed out on social media that Birmingham City retired Bellingham's shirt when he left the club and that, at this rate, Real Madrid may have to do the same. A tongue-in-cheek remark, certainly, yet few players have taken to the Bernabeu with such authority, and fewer still at 20 years old. Bellingham's *Clasico*-winning brace at the end of October took him to 13 goals in all competitions, already surpassing the highest-scoring campaign of Zinedine Zidane, the most famous wearer of Real's No.5 shirt.

Yet that brace also meant that the Englishman had accounted for 43 per cent of Real's La Liga goals this term and, while the 4-3-1-2 system has got the best out of him, others are not so comfortable. Eduardo Camavinga and Aurelien Tchouameni have both been asked to fill in in defence, while the goal outputs of forwards Rodrygo and Vinicius Junior are down on last season.

For Carlo Ancelotti, the situation is unsustainable: "He's started well, but we don't think of him as a goalscorer," said Real's coach of Bellingham. "We need goals from the forwards, too."



Top talent... Takefusa Kubo

Few players have taken to the Bernabeu with such authority, and fewer still at 20 years old

What have we learnt of the other title challengers so far?
Xavi, who recently took charge of his 100th game as Barcelona coach, still divides fans despite signing a new contract until 2025. At times, his side seem to lack rhythm in attack and they are certainly less tight at the back – they could surpass their 20 goals conceded in the entirety of 2022-23 before the end of the year.

Atletico Madrid's derby win highlighted the danger of Diego Simeone's side, who will, as ever, be looking to capitalise on any inconsistency from their main title rivals. Antoine Griezmann continues to shine, while they also seem to have recaptured the steely ability to grind out games that saw them lift the 2020-21 La Liga trophy.

Other than Bellingham, which other young stars have stood out?
Japanese talent Takefusa Kubo finally appears to be fulfilling his potential. The former Barcelona and Real Madrid youngster recently said that his move to Real Sociedad "saved his career" after he started the campaign with five goals in his first seven games, including one in the 3-0 win in the Basque derby. He's in demand but, with Real Madrid holding 50 per cent of his economic rights, it would take a huge offer to prise him away from San Sebastian.

What's going on at Sevilla?
It's Groundhog Day. For a second consecutive season, Sevilla started slowly, winning only two of their first eight league games. And, just like 2022-23, when Julen Lopetegui was sacked after ten games, they changed managers in October. Jose Luis Mendilibar was only hired in March as a short-term fix to save the club from their relegation worries, and he did that and more, steering them to mid-table comfort and a record-extending seventh Europa League trophy. The euphoria of that European success saw the club offer the tough-talking coach a contract extension – although the fact that it was only for one season suggested that they weren't entirely convinced.

As it turns out, the direct football that helped Sevilla survive last season wasn't quite as attractive when results weren't going their way. A 2-2 draw with Rayo Vallecano, summarised by popular squad member Fernando's palpable frustration at being substituted before half-time, was the final straw.

In Mendilibar's place, Diego Alonso became the club's fourth head coach in 12 months. The former Uruguay boss arrived promising attractive, attacking football, yet earned his first point thanks to an own goal via a defender's flick, with Sergio Ramos helping earn a 1-1 draw against his old club Real Madrid.

How is Rafael Benitez's return to Spain going?
So far, not well. The former Real Madrid and Valencia coach joined Celta Vigo in June, but after just one win from their first 12 La Liga games the club were languishing in the relegation zone.

During October's international break, the club hierarchy stressed that despite results not being what they had hoped for, Benitez still had their "full support" and that the team had "fewer points than they deserved".

The 1-1 draw with Sevilla at the start of November, which saw VAR overturn a penalty awarded in Celta's favour, was another blow. The fact that the board offered Benitez a three-year deal, which would be extremely costly to terminate, could be a factor in deciding how long he gets to improve the situation.

Results haven't been aided by Iago Aspas' concerning lack of goals. The 36-year-old striker, so often the club's saviour in recent seasons and top scorer in the past eight league campaigns, saw his goal drought extend to seven months in October.

Under pressure ...Rafael Benitez

Bundesliga update

Should Thomas Tuchel feel secure as Bayern Munich boss?
On the basis that he is one of the world's most accomplished coaches and has only been in the post since late March, Tuchel should be a protected species at the Allianz Arena. The reality, though, is somewhat different. In previous jobs – at Mainz, Dortmund, Paris Saint-Germain and Chelsea – this most prickly of characters has always ended up at odds with those around him, and similar fault lines seem to be appearing at Bayern.

Tuchel never has been one for the diplomatic corps and has expressed dissatisfaction on more than one occasion with what he sees as Bayern's lack of squad depth. He was especially miffed with the failure to sign a specialist defensive midfielder in the summer and continues to assert that a spate of injuries could prove costly. As one might have expected, such complaints sparked a withering response from Bayern honorary chairman Uli Hoeness who, in an interview with *RTL*, pointed out that Bayern's bench was full of internationals. Hoeness, still the power behind the throne at Bayern, added that there would be no significant incomings in January.

Bayern's shock defeat to third-tier Saarbrucken in the German Cup certainly would not have helped Tuchel's cause, but at least normal service was resumed a few days later with his side running rings around arch-rivals Dortmund in a 4-0 win at the Westfalenstadion. Panic over – for now.

Bayern boss... Thomas Tuchel

How has Harry Kane been received at Bayern?
With 15 goals and five assists in his first ten Bundesliga matches, including a sensational strike from inside his own half against Darmstadt and a hat-trick in the *Klassiker* versus Dortmund, Kane has made a wonderful start to life in Germany, impressive enough for pundits to imagine him breaking Robert Lewandowski's all-time scoring record in the German top flight (41 goals for Bayern in 2020-21). He has effortlessly integrated, impressing team-mates and coaches with his professionalism, work ethic and down-to-earth manner.

Wonderful start ...Harry Kane

Everyone at Bayern knew they were recruiting a marvellous finisher in Kane, but they were less aware of the England skipper's outstanding ability to drop deep and link the play. Many were expecting Kane to be only focused on goalscoring. Instead, they have a complete leader of the line.

Cynics, however, argue that Kane's purple patch is as much a sign of the league's defensive weakness as the Englishman's prowess. The first nine rounds of Bundesliga action saw 297 goals scored, more than any other top-five league and, while the exploits of Kane, Stuttgart's Serhou Guirassy, RB Leipzig's Lois Openda and Victor Boniface of Leverkusen should all be applauded, some observers say that defending has become a lost art in German football.

Can anyone end Bayern's 11-year title-winning streak?
Under the inspirational management of

Title contenders... Bayer Leverkusen celebrate a late equaliser against Bayern in August

Xabi Alonso, Bayer Leverkusen have gone from the relegation zone to the heavens. More or less every Bundesliga observer would concur that the *Werkself* are the best team in the country at the moment, ahead of the game in terms of balance, collective cohesion, attacking fluidity and tactical flexibility.

Everywhere you look, they appear a class apart: in the defensive midfield department where Granit Xhaka and Exequiel Palacios complement each other wonderfully; the creative guile of Florian Wirtz and Jonas Hofmann; on-fire Nigerian striker Victor Boniface and the ever-impressive wing-back duo of Jeremie Frimpong and Alex Grimaldo. Even at the back, for so long Leverkusen's Achilles heel, they have improved markedly, with the three-man unit of Odilon Kossounou, Jonathan Tah and Edmond Tapsoba cutting out the sloppy unforced errors of yore.

> Many were expecting Kane to be only focused on goalscoring. Instead, they have a complete leader of the line

Previously wedded to the concept of 100-miles-an-hour football, Leverkusen suddenly have discovered control and devastating changes of rhythm. They will take some beating.

After an outstanding 2022-23, why are Union Berlin struggling?

One of the main reasons for Union's autumnal malaise – 12 straight defeats in all comps from September to early November – has to be the destruction of their previous steady recruitment policy in the off-season. Mindful that they were about to embark on their first-ever Champions League campaign, Union clearly felt compelled to be more active in the summer 2023 transfer market. But ten new arrivals and 16 departures was a recipe for disaster.

So much change only served to destroy their greatest strengths: their formidable team spirit and understanding. Hopes were high in the summer that new signings of the calibre of veteran Italy centre-back Leonardo Bonucci, Germany wing-back Robin Gosens and former Leverkusen and Monaco striker Kevin Volland would enable the club to push onwards and upwards. Instead the Berliner have fallen apart, their trademark mental toughness, defensive organisation and opportunism in the attacking-third all scattered to the winds.

Will Serhou Guirassy still be at Stuttgart beyond this season?

Very unlikely. After an incredible 14 goals in his first eight league games – a haul featuring two hat-tricks and three braces – the French-born Guinea international is hot property, an object of desire for a raft of clubs in Europe's top leagues. And just to stir the pot of interest even more, he is eminently affordable. According to Sky Sports Germany journalist Florian Plettenberg, Guirassy has a release clause of just €17.5 million, which will be valid in the next two transfer windows. Some have suggested he will head for the exit door as early as January, but that seems unlikely; he is enjoying his football at a renascent Stuttgart, while his first priority in January will be the upcoming Africa Cup of Nations finals.

Struggling... Union Berlin

In-form striker... Serhou Guirassy

Ligue 1 update

PSG star man... Kylian Mbappe

What's changed at Paris Saint-Germain?
Since QSI's 2011 buyout, PSG's performances have remained broadly consistent, regardless of coach or personnel – but this year feels different. Young talents like 17-year-old midfielder Warren Zaire-Emery are being blooded, the arrival of France internationals – defender Lucas Hernandez, striker Randal Kolo-Muani and winger Ousmane Dembele – add to the homegrown feel, while the garish glamour has been dialled down since Neymar's summer departure.

It's also clear this team needs time to grow. The 4-1 Champions League humbling at Newcastle underlined PSG's Kylian Mbappe-dependency, a woefully understrength midfield, and a lack of technicality needed to progress the ball from deep at the elite level. Ligue 1 draws with Clermont, Lorient and Toulouse exposed a lack of creativity without the individuality of Neymar and Lionel Messi.

However, this team has plenty of promise and will grow as a group, while coach Luis Enrique is slowly designing a system that doesn't rely on individuals. The transitional season is an alien concept at PSG, but this campaign, especially in Europe, may yet have to be sacrificed to achieve longer-term aims.

Is a genuine title race developing?
France's fierce competitiveness is both a positive and a negative, as such strength in depth often prevents one challenger to PSG from emerging. This year, with bigger clubs struggling and few stragglers, that process has intensified and could yet come to Paris' rescue. Despite a below-par start, PSG have remained competitive, with rivals also dropping points.

However, PSG's transition has presented both Monaco and Nice, who lack European distractions, with genuine, albeit long, shots at the title. Under new coach Francesco Farioli, Nice's innovative and progressive style has proven effective, winning away at both their rivals, although maintaining those standards will be tough.

Monaco, meanwhile, despite also starting afresh under Adi Hutter, boast a quality, experienced and well-balanced squad that didn't suffer the usual summer exodus. New striker Folarin Balogun has started quickly, Takumi Minamino has miraculously rediscovered his form after a woeful first season, and 20-year-old centre-back Soungoutou Magassa is fast becoming Ligue 1's most promising youngster. A title charge should now be their aim.

What's behind Nice's resurgence?
A major ideological pivot has been undertaken by the club in the last year, moving away from scattergun recruitment, dour football and clashing boardroom egos. Under sporting director Florent Ghisolfi, who was signed last October after leading Lens' explosive return to Ligue 1, the new Nice are a more precise enterprise with a clear

Ligue 1 title contenders... Nice players celebrate beating PSG

Contenders... Monaco and Nice are challenging PSG this season

plan both on and off the field.

Appointing the largely untested Farioli was a risk, but his modern system of ball progression and a smart press have made Nice the most tactically progressive club in France this season. September's deserved 3-2 victory at the Parc des Princes pointed to how far Farioli's team has come already. Additions were minimal but technical midfielder Morgan Sanson and winger Jeremie Boga have slotted in neatly to complement an already talented squad, despite a summer exodus of aging stars.

With the league more competitive than ever and traditional pacesetters struggling, Nice are best placed to capitalise.

What forced Marseille's shock coaching switch?

Crisis never ends at the Velodrome, but recent fiascos have become increasingly self-inflicted – a situation underlined by coach Marcelino's resignation after just seven games, citing "intimidation, threats, insults and slander." Frustrated OM fans met with president Pablo Longoria in September, lamenting a functional style of play and the sales of crowd favourites, particularly Dimitri Payet. Supporters reportedly threatened Longoria's family and accused him of financial wrongdoing.

Longoria proved his innocence through a voluntary audit of his accounts, even sharing private conversations with his mother. Nevertheless, such hostility forced the entire management team to consider their positions. Longoria and his directors stayed, but Marcelino left, explaining that his job couldn't be carried out in such conditions.

OM's last four coaches have all resigned, and three were fan-influenced. Andre Villas-Boas left shortly after ultras stormed the training ground in January 2021, while Igor Tudor exited in May, referencing the Velodrome's pressure. Fiery new boss Gennaro Gattuso is designed as a crowd-pleaser, but the fans' conduct hasn't improved: an attack on Lyon's team bus caused a serious injury to opposition boss Fabio Grosso and led to the match being called off.

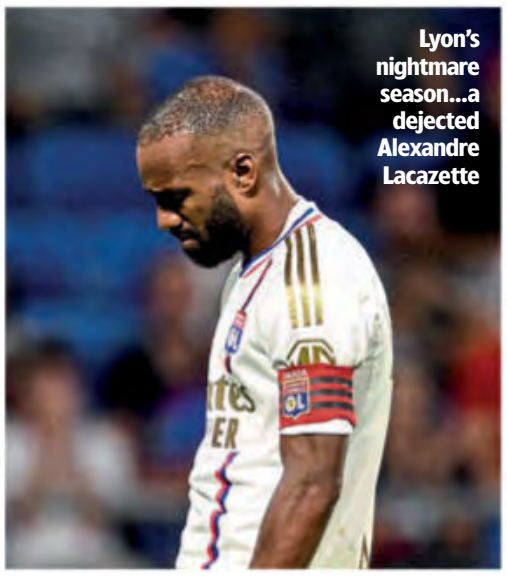
> PSG's transition has presented both Monaco and Nice with genuine, albeit long, shots at the title

Why are Lyon struggling?

Just over three years after making the Champions League semi-finals, Lyon are now arguably the most embattled and underperforming club in Europe. Coach Laurent Blanc's out-dated tactics were quickly exposed, prompting his September sacking, but the €85 million summer transfer profit points to OL's real problems. Scepticism over new owner John Textor's budget led footballing authorities to impose significant financial restraints. This means that the quality of academy graduates like attacker Bradley Barcola (PSG) and centre-back Castello Lukeba (RB Leipzig), plus a host of reliable first-team players, hasn't been replaced.

Although new coach Grosso – who has admitted relegation fears – still has firepower in the form of captain Alexandre Lacazette and Rayan Cherki, his incoherent tinkering has produced an alarmingly porous side that already badly lack spirit and cohesion amid public sniping between club officials and former president Jean Michel Aulas, plus pressure from a vitriolic fanbase. The atmosphere has become increasingly toxic and, although January reinforcements are likely, that mood will have to change if OL are to survive.

The new man in charge at Marseille...fiery boss Gennaro Gattuso



Lyon's nightmare season...a dejected Alexandre Lacazette

Serie A update

Suspended... Juve wonderkid Nicolo Fagioli

Osimhen...the Nigerian reacts after getting substituted in September

With no European distractions, can Juventus reclaim the title?
Banned from European competition in the wake of their points sanction by the Italian Football Federation (FIGC) for questionable off-the-books accounting practises in recent seasons, Juventus obviously have a lighter fixture schedule than their rivals.

Furthermore, despite a traumatic start to the season off the field – iconic captain Leonardo Bonucci joined Union Berlin and has since threatened to sue the club, Paul Pogba is facing a possible ban if found guilty of doping offences, and Nicolo Fagioli, last season's Serie A Young Player of the Year, has been suspended by the FIGC for the rest of the season for breaching betting rules – Juve are very much in the frame to win their first title since 2020.

Their former coach Fabio Capello recently told *La Gazzetta dello Sport* that he expects Juve to feature in the title contest right down to the very end and, as long as their off-field issues don't cause too much of a distraction, they will remain competitive.

Who are the other title contenders?
The first impression after the first quarter of the campaign is that the usual suspects of Internazionale and Milan will battle it out with Juve for this season's *Scudetto*, with the league's three most successful teams out in front in the early stages. However, the fact that no side made it to six games without defeat suggests that the contest is likely to go down to the wire, with no one set to dominate in the manner of Napoli last season.

Inter and Juve have both already lost to the useful Sassuolo, while Milan have already suffered defeats to two title rivals, beaten 5-1 by Inter in the *Derby della Madonnina* and then losing 1-0 at home to Juventus. With Inter top at the start of November and with Argentine striker Lautaro Martinez running away at the top of the scoring charts, the *Nerazzurri* look the current favourites.

Can last year's champions Napoli recover from their slow start?
Napoli's first two losses, 2-1 to Lazio and 3-1 to Fiorentina, both on home soil, certainly set alarm bells ringing, with many critics suggesting that Napoli's new coach Rudi Garcia may not make it to Christmas if results do no improve.

Such judgements, however, may be hasty. No permanent damage has been done to the Napoli cause. At the time of writing the defending champions remain within touching distance of the top three, sitting in fourth spot and in the Champions League places.

It does, though, remain to be seen

Familiar favourites... Milan, Inter and Juventus lead the Serie A title race

if Garcia can inspire his men to the manic level of commitment that distinguished Luciano Spalletti's remarkable side last season.

A bigger problem could develop if their superb Nigerian striker Victor Osimhen does not soon renew his contract. So far, he and his entourage have failed to agree both his salary and the size of his buyout clause, while a touchline disagreement with Garcia in September and a fall-out over the club's social media output are not indicative of a happy camp.

Will there be a Rome revival and who will lead it – Lazio's Sarri or Roma's Mourinho?

Neither of the capital city's biggest clubs, Lazio and Roma, got off to a good start, with the two sides each losing four of their first ten league games. While Maurizio Sarri and Jose Mourinho remain two of the most capable coaches around, they are both being let down by the quality of their squads.

> The first impression is that the usual suspects of Internazionale, Milan and Juventus will battle it out for this season's *Scudetto*

Lazio have badly missed Sergej Milinkovic-Savic, who dominated their midfield for eight seasons before moving to Saudi Arabia in the summer. His long-time midfield partner Luis Alberto has tried to fill the gap, as have new signings Daichi Kamada (ex-Eintracht Frankfurt) and Matteo Guendouzi (ex-Marseille). The Japan international underlined his potential by scoring the winner in the surprise 2-1 win against Napoli, but neither of the new boys have adequately filled the Serbian's shoes.

As for Roma, their brightest moment so far saw them dismantle hapless Empoli 7-0 in September. Meanwhile, their manager – surprise, surprise – continues to have brushes with referees. During stoppage-time of October's 1-0 early kick-off victory over ten-man Monza – thanks to a 90th-minute goal from striker Stephan El-Shaarawy – Mourinho picked up a red card when he infuriated the Monza bench by making a "cry baby" face gesture towards them.

Can resurgent Fiorentina finish in the Champions League places?

If there has been a surprise so far this season, it has been Fiorentina who sat fourth going into October's international break. You have to go back to the 2014-15 campaign for the last time the Florence club ended the season in fourth spot, but a 3-1 win over Napoli in early October suggested that great things might be on the way for Vincenzo Italiano's side. After the internationals, however, they were disappointingly beaten by local rivals, Empoli, 2-0 at home, before consecutive 1-0 defeats followed to Lazio and Juventus, indicating that staying in the race for the coveted Champions League spots might prove a step too far for the *Viola*.

Rome bosses...Roma's Jose Mourinho and Lazio's Maurizio Sarri

Fluctuating form ...Fiorentina had impressed before a recent nose-dive

Words Nick Bidwell

Bryan ZARAGOZA

Granada

In a sentence
Dazzling street player who was recently rewarded for a memorable brace against Barcelona with a call-up to the full Spain squad.

What they say
"He didn't surprise me. We'd analysed him and knew he was a bullet on the right flank [and] that they would be relying on him in transitions and counter-attacks. He's very difficult to stop."

Barcelona coach Xavi after Bryan's goals against the Catalans

"He has so much natural talent, but the most important thing is to convince him that he has to stay focused. He has to be demanding of himself, to look after himself. Too much praise can cause problems."

Granada boss Paco Lopez

The story so far
This season, his inaugural term in La Liga, the diminutive 22-year-old virtuoso needed no time at all to acclimatise, scoring five times in his first ten appearances, sparking media plaudits galore and making his debut for Spain in a Euro 2024 qualifier against Scotland.

He was not always so revered: as a youngster, he was rejected by a string of pro outfits – including Sevilla, Betis, Valladolid and hometown side Malaga – and instead had to make do with the grounding on offer at local clubs CD Tiro Pichon and Conejito La Luz.

Four years ago, he received his big break when Granada opted to sign him. He spent the 2020-21 season on loan at El Ejido, a club in the Almeria region who competed in the third tier of the Spanish pyramid. He spent the following season (2021-22) playing for Granada reserves in the tier below, though he did make his first-team debut during that campaign, in a Copa del Rey tie against Laguna in November 2021.

> "He's very difficult to stop"
> Barcelona coach Xavi

3 THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT ZARAGOZA

- As a youngster, he idolised Barcelona legend Lionel Messi.
- At just 17 seconds, his first goal against Barca in October was Granada's fastest-ever strike.
- He recently became Granada's first Spanish international since 1974 and is only the fourth player from the club to represent the national team.

Last season he went from strength to strength as Granada secured the second division title. The team's number one impact substitute, Zaragoza grew increasingly influential, notably on the scoresheet in each of the final three games – his goals against Mirandes and Lugo, in particular, were both absolute works of art – but is now very much established as a regular starter.

The next step
Given his sensational arrival on the Spanish scene, there must be every chance that he will leave Granada at the end of the season for a La Liga behemoth. Real Madrid, who have a good relationship with Granada, already have their sights trained on him, as do Barcelona, who are reportedly ready to table an offer. Granada must, as a matter of urgency, revise his employment details: currently under contract until 2027, his buyout clause is a paltry €14 million.

Strengths
Undoubtedly his explosive pace, mesmerising dribbling ability and visceral need to take on and beat defenders. His low centre of gravity and elusiveness pose a particular problem to bulkier opponents, while his boundless energy means that he never seems to stop running.

Weaknesses
Off the ball, he has much to learn, particularly in his defensive responsibilities and game-management. He can also be a little naive at times.

Nikolas AGRAFIOTIS

Excelsior
After an unhappy time in Rotterdam last season – out for a couple of months with a knee injury, then mainly used as a sub – the tall striker is now in an altogether different place, an automatic selection at the point of attack and scoring week in, week out. Dutch-born to a Greek father and Serbian mother with U16 caps for the latter, his international future could be up for grabs.

Nabil ALIOUI

Le Havre
Born in the south of France to Moroccan parents, this pocket-sized winger or centre-forward failed to make the grade at mother club Monaco, but has bounced back with a vengeance at Norman flagship club Le Havre, whom he helped win promotion to Ligue 1 last term. Elegant, acrobatic and blessed with remarkable goalscoring instincts.

Maximilian BEIER

Hoffenheim
Not so long ago, the management at Hoffenheim were so unconvinced by the young striker that they loaned him to second tier Hannover for two seasons. But no one doubts the 21-year-old anymore: with six goals in Hoffenheim's first eight games of the season, he is currently being touted as a future full international.

Robert BOZENIK

Boavista
The 24-year-old Slovakia striker has provided much of the fuel for Boavista's surprise encampment in the upper reaches of the Portuguese top flight. Previously with Dutch side Feyenoord, German outfit Fortuna Dusseldorf (loan) and hometown club Zilina, he made the perfect start to the 2023-24 campaign by scoring twice in a shock 3-2 win over champions Benfica on the opening day.

Kevin DENKEY

Cercle Brugge
The most potent taker of chances in the Belgian league at the moment, the Togo international striker inevitably has been the subject of much positive press of late. So much so that former Anderlecht, Club Brugge and Belgium centre-forward Marc Degryse recently opined that Denkey's irresistibly powerful physique reminded him of a certain Romelu Lukaku.

Evan FERGUSON

Brighton
Outstanding teenage striker, 19, who very much threw down his calling card when netting a memorable treble for Brighton in a 3-1 win over Newcastle in September – becoming only the fourth player to hit a Premier League hat-trick aged 18 or younger. Brighton manager Roberto De Zerbi believes the Republic of Ireland youngster "could become one of the best scorers in Europe."

Nikola KRSTOVIC

Lecce
The 23-year-old Montenegrin national team striker has certainly looked the part since leaving Slovakian outfit DAC Dunajska Streda for Lecce in Serie A this summer, scoring in each of his first three outings for the *Giallorossi*, a unique feat in the Puglia club's history. The former Red Star Belgrade and Zeta front-man is extremely powerful in the air and can finish with either foot.

Kajetan SZMYT

Warta Poznan
Incredibly mature 21-year-old winger or attacking midfielder, who, in addition to his strength on the ball, is also an excellent finisher, often popping up with vital goals for his hometown club. After three loan spells (at Gornik Polkowice and Nielba Wagrowiec), he's now really flourishing with the Greens – winning the Polish top flight's Young Player of the Month for August – and a first full international cap can't be far away.

Spotlight

VICTOR OSIMHEN

"There is so much more to come from me"

Victor Osimhen is one in a long line of stellar Nigerian centre-forwards, but in many ways he is altogether unique. **Oluwashina Okeleji** sits down with the Super Eagles goal machine ahead of Nigeria's quest to win AFCON 2023

Since breaking out as part of the country's successful Under-17 World Cup-winning side in 2015, Victor Osimhen has been earmarked for superstardom in much the same way as Wilson Oruma, Chrisantus Macauley, Kelechi Iheanacho and Sani Emmanuel – all Nigerians who won the same competition as well as the Golden Boot – were before him.

The results have been mixed down the years: Oruma and Iheanacho have built successful careers, while Emmanuel and Macauley faltered. However, Osimhen has lived up to the expectation and then some, in September becoming the first Nigerian to be nominated for the Ballon d'Or since Nwankwo Kanu in 1999.

"I played football growing up with the dream of becoming one of the best players in the world," he tells *World Soccer*. "I watched some of the greats on television and deeply imagined what it would be like to be on that stage.

"I think you can see the desire in my game whenever I'm on the pitch; I fight for every ball, I don't take no for an answer. That's where that comes from. Being nominated as one of the 30 top players shows all that effort was worth it. It's huge for me and my family."

There can be no doubt as to Osimhen's merit either. Last season the 24-year-old not only became the first African to finish top of the Serie A goalscoring charts but led Napoli to their first Serie A title triumph in 33 years in the process. While very much a collective effort, it was no coincidence that, during the delirious celebrations at the club's Stadio Diego Maradona, it was Osimhen's name that was sung loudest by the fans. A trip to Naples reflects the public displays of adoration for Victor Osimhen in a city that has long been a shrine to the cult of Maradona. There are murals of the Nigerian alongside the former icon now. His legacy in that passionate footballing city is now set in stone.

For all that his achievements now see him spoken of in the same breath as some of the greats of Nigerian football, none before him have dominated Europe to the same degree. Even Kanu, who won some of the biggest trophies on offer at club level, never did so as the undisputed attacking lynchpin either at Dutch side Ajax or with Arsenal in the Premier League; his accomplishments now look set to be emulated and exceeded by Osimhen.

As for other Nigerian forwards, Victor Ikpeba was revered by Monaco fans for his goals and Rashidi Yekini, the gold standard for Nigerian strikers, won the Golden Boot in Portugal in 1993, but neither could deliver a title turning out for Monaco and modest Vitoria de Setubal respectively. In that sense, Osimhen's body of work so far is unprecedented: not only has he reached legendary status in European club football, he has done so all while bearing the weight of great expectation from his teenage years. He is also, by

Ready to step up for his country... Victor Osimhen
Credit: Alamy

common consensus, in the elite bracket of centre-forwards in world football.

"Rashidi Yekini, Kanu...these are legends," he says. "I won't sit here and say I can challenge them with what they have done for Nigerian football. They're the ones who paved the way, and for me it's already a blessing to be able to follow in their footsteps. But I want to write my own story, create a special legacy. I appreciate the comparisons and it's an honour to be seen as the 'next this' or 'next that', but I'm Victor Osimhen, no one else. There is so much more to come from me."

If, as expected, Osimhen wins the CAF African Player of the Year award, he will have, from an individual standpoint, equalled the achievements of the greats he grew up idolising. The one area where there remains an asterisk is on the international stage: so far, despite finishing as leading goalscorer in consecutive Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) qualification series, he has yet to headline a major tournament with the Super Eagles.

Ahead of the 2021 AFCON, Osimhen suffered fractures to his cheekbone and eye socket, ruling him out of the tournament, while Nigeria failed to qualify for the 2022 World Cup finals, eliminated by Ghana on away goals in a two-legged play-off.

His 20 goals in 28 appearances already puts him within two of Segun Odegbami, Nigeria's second-highest goalscorer of all time (Yekini is out in front with 37). However, with the vast majority of his haul coming in qualifiers, Osimhen has unfinished business still: if his legacy is to stack up with the greats, he will need to deliver international silverware.

"I really want to win everything with Nigeria, and I think it's possible," he says. "We have a very gifted team full of players who are doing really

Qatar heartbreak ...Osimhen during Nigeria's World Cup qualifying defeat to Ghana on away goals

AFCON 2019... Osimhen only played one game in Egypt

good for their clubs as well. They provide me with support, and that allows me to focus on scoring the goals we need. That's all I really care about: getting goals for the team. If I do that consistently, the rest will come.

"Obviously, we could not make it to [the World Cup in] Qatar, which was a big disappointment for us. Nigerians were really eager for it, especially because we were playing against Ghana. The support they gave us that day in Abuja was massive. But, unfortunately, we could not make them proud. That hurt us a lot.

"We have tried to quickly put that behind us and we have a different coaching crew now with new ideas, so we will see how it goes. But I definitely want to help my country to another title in Cote d'Ivoire. It has been ten years already: if we don't win, people will ask: 'What happened in the Osimhen era?' That's the truth."

Osimhen's AFCON imperative is one that is unlikely to be shared by his club. In spite of the injury that ruled him out of the 2021 edition, the sense persisted back home that Napoli were overly cautious with his recovery timeline. The fact that the club could not field him either did little to debunk that conspiracy theory, especially considering a tweet from the player that seemed to suggest he was ready for selection a fortnight before the tournament kicked off. There were also earlier comments by Napoli president Aurelio De Laurentiis to the effect that he would avoid signing African footballers on account of the AFCON.

Just as it did in the summer, transfer gossip is sure to swirl around Osimhen in January, especially with Napoli's title defence off to a rocky start, contract renewal talks up in the air and his relationship with the club's management strained. In September, his agent threatened to take legal action against Napoli over a TikTok video mocking the striker, with Nigeria's Sports Minister even intervening, while a club statement later said that it "never intended to offend or mock Victor Osimhen, who is a technical asset of the club. To demonstrate this, during the summer training camp, the club firmly rejected every offer received for the attacker's transfer abroad."

> "If we don't win, people will ask: 'What happened in the Osimhen era?' That's the truth"

That resistance to offers is likely to continue, and while Osimhen has put the episode behind him he acknowledges the complexity of the situation.

"It's not a straightforward issue," he admits. "Napoli have given me a lot. Their passionate fans spur me on, and have brought out the best in me. But, at the same time, playing for your country is different...nothing beats it. I was not able to play in Cameroon last time, but since then I've grown as a footballer and as a leader. This is the right time for me to step up for my country.

"During our last qualifier [a 6-0 victory over Sao Tome and Principe in September], hearing our fans in Uyo support not just me but the team with such passion, you can't compare anything to that. And if I want to be remembered like Yekini or Kanu, I have to do what they did."

That would mean winning not just AFCON, but the Olympic Games, as Nigeria's men did back in 1996. That star-studded side, featuring not just Kanu as captain but the likes of Jay-Jay Okocha, Taribo West, Daniel Amokachi, Celestine Babayaro, Sunday Oliseh and Tijani Babangida – as well as Oruma and Ikpeba – continues to be spoken of with great reverence in Nigeria and the rest of Africa.

Nigeria failed to qualify for next year's Olympics in Paris, edged out over two legs by Guinea. However, with squads allowed three slots for over-23 players, Osimhen would be a tremendous asset come 2028 in Los Angeles.

"Why not? If we qualify and I'm called upon, it would mean a lot to represent Nigeria at the Olympics," he says. 2028 is five years away; a lifetime in footballing terms.

In truth if, by that time, an Olympics victory is all that is left for Osimhen's legacy, he will arguably have already cemented his place in the pantheon of Nigerian and African football.

Serie A struggles... Napoli's title defence has got off to a poor start

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AFCON TUG OF WAR

Moving the Africa Cup of Nations to the start of 2024 has presented players and coaches with a headache

Words: Mark Gleeson

It was player pressure, more than the bleating of club managers, that finally saw African football make a firm decision to move their Cup of Nations finals from the opening months of every second year to a slot in the off-season.

Increasingly torn between club and country, footballers were threatening to forsake the tournament, even under the threat of ending their international careers, if it was not moved to a date that would not force them to make the difficult choice between club and country.

The club versus country tug of war was never an issue at the Cup of Nations until 1988 when restrictions on professional players competing were lifted. There was a trickle of players from clubs in Europe who competed at the tournaments thereafter, but once those numbers began to grow, the French league persuaded the Confederation of African Football (CAF) to move the Cup of Nations, from March to January, during their brief winter break. Then when European clubs tired of losing key African and/or South American players to international duty at haphazard times, the co-ordinated international calendar was introduced by FIFA under pressure from a powerful lobby. But a stubborn CAF president Issa Hayatou refused to move the Cup of Nations to mid-year, despite wider European pressure, for fear of being seen to cave in to the demands of the "colonists of the north". He steadfastly stuck to the January, offering up no end of weak supporting arguments. Once Ahmad from Madagascar took over as president in 2017, he called for a summit on the African game and it was there it was decided to move the tournament to mid-year.

CAF made the change for the 2019 tournament, despite some oppressive summer heat in host nation Egypt, but are now back to staging the event in January, albeit with an element of force majeure rather than a reversal of their promise.

Cameroon's hosting of the 2021 tournament in January 2022 had much to do with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and a 12-month postponement, while the reason the Ivory Coast finals are being held in January 2024 is a six-month delay caused by fears over the rainy season. These concerns have since been given some credence by the flooding of their new showpiece Ebimpe stadium in Abidjan, where the final will be played on February 11, which caused the abandonment of a friendly the Ivorians hosted in September.

It has not been made clear whether future Cup of Nations finals (2025 in Morocco and 2027 in East Africa – co-hosted by Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda) will revert to mid-year dates as the impending expansion of the Club World Cup could prove a counter attraction, but early indications from CAF insiders say that it will again go back to being hosted in June-July.

Hit hard...Nottingham Forest could lose seven players to the 2023 AFCON finals, including Cheikhou Kouyate, Willy Boly and Serge Aurier

That will come as a relief to both players and club coaches alike but does not take away the fact that the next edition will see players forced to leave their club in mid-season to go off and play in the Ivory Coast. The Cup of Nations, therefore, makes an unwelcome impact on the European club scene where an ever-increasing majority of African internationals earn their daily bread or aspire to play.

A total of 18 of the 20 Premier League clubs will be affected, none more so than Nottingham Forest, who could lose seven players for the finals, which runs from January 13 to February 11.

Time away from the club, however, can be longer because FIFA regulations dictate players be released two weeks before a continental championship.

The Premier League now does have a mini-break which mitigates that somewhat but, in the case of Forest, players could miss four Premier League matches, plus the FA Cup third and fourth rounds (if Forest progress).

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp came under fire two years ago for miscontrued comments about the timing of the AFCON finals, and he will once again lose key man Mohamed Salah, although the Reds have managed to broker a deal whereby the attacking superstar joins up with the Egyptian team at the last possible moment.

The sale of former African Footballer of the Year Riyad Mahrez to Al Ahly in the Saudi Pro League means that Manchester City are one of the two English clubs not affected, along with Newcastle United.

Europe's other top leagues will see a significant increase in the impact, simply because they have so many more African players on their books.

France is always hard hit by the Cup of Nations. Ligue 1 will resume after a brief break on the weekend of January 13-14, but the top-flight clubs join the last-64 round of the French Cup the week before. There were 56 players from the French top flight at the last Cup of Nations finals in Cameroon, including one third of the squad for the host nation. This time there could be as many as 75 from the French top flight and perhaps half as many from the lower leagues.

For the first time, Italy will see almost 50 players going away, setting a record for participation in the Cup of Nations for players arriving from Serie A, which has no winter break in January.

That is a significant jump from the 14 Serie A players that competed at the 2017 finals, when the tournament was held in January

A total of 18 of the 20 Premier League clubs will be affected, none more so than Nottingham Forest, who could lose seven players for the tournament

Missing Mo...Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp will sorely miss Salah

Napoli's AFCON stars ...Victor Osimhen and Andre-Frank Zambo Anguissa

and hosted by Gabon. Two years later, there were 15 Italian-based players at the finals in Egypt, and 24 at the last edition. Internazionale, Juventus and Lazio will not lose any players but Salernitana and Udinese could see five players each disappear for the finals.

Depending on how long they go for, they could miss up to five Serie A matchdays, starting with the 19th, scheduled for January 6-7, up to and including the 24th matchday, the weekend of February 10-11.

Napoli president Aurelio De Laurentiis has thundered several times about losing top striker Victor Osimhen and midfield engine Andre-Frank Zambo Anguissa, possibly too for the final of the Italian Super Cup, scheduled for January 25 in Saudi Arabia. Osimhen is one of 11 Nigerians in Serie A this season, although not all will make Jose Peseiro's final squad.

Spain's La Liga, which has no break, will lose up to 20 players. The Bundesliga stops for a break just before Christmas but is back underway on January 12, and will see at least 15 players depart, including one of this campaign's top scorers, Stuttgart's Serhou Guirassy.

AFCON 2023 ABSENTEES

Players likely to be lost to clubs in January

PREMIER LEAGUE

ARSENAL: Mohamed Elneny *(Egypt)*, Thomas Partey *(Ghana)*
ASTON VILLA: Bertrand Traore *(Burkina Faso)*
BOURNEMOUTH: Dango Ouattara *(Burkina Faso)*, Antoine Semenyo *(Ghana)*, Hamed Traore *(Ivory Coast)*
BRENTFORD: Bryan Mbeumo *(Cameroon)*, Yoane Wissa *(DR Congo)*, Frank Onyeka *(Nigeria)*
BRIGHTON & HOVE ALBION: Carlos Baleba *(Cameroon)*, Tariq Lamptey *(Ghana)*, Simon Adingra *(Ivory Coast)*
BURNLEY: Anass Zaroury *(Morocco)*, Lyle Foster *(South Africa)*
CHELSEA: Nicolas Jackson *(Senegal)*
CRYSTAL PALACE: Jordan Ayew, Jeffrey Schlupp *(both Ghana)*, Cheick Doucoure *(Mali)*
EVERTON: Abdoulaye Doucoure *(Mali)*, Idrissa Gana Gueye *(Senegal)*
FULHAM: Calvin Bassey, Alex Iwobi *(both Nigeria)*, Fodo Ballo-Toure *(Senegal)*
LIVERPOOL: Mohamed Salah *(Egypt)*
LUTON TOWN: Issa Kabore *(Burkina Faso)*, Pelly Ruddock Mpanzu *(DR Congo)*
MANCHESTER UNITED: Andre Onana *(Cameroon)*, Sofyan Amrabat *(Morocco)*, Hannibal Mejbri *(Tunisia)*
NOTTINGHAM FOREST: Serge Aurier, Willy Boly, Ibrahim Sangare *(all Ivory Coast)*, Ola Aina, Taiwo Awoniyi *(both Nigeria)*, Cheikhou Kouyate, Moussa Niakhate *(both Senegal)*
SHEFFIELD UNITED: Yasser Larouci *(Algeria)*, Benie Traore *(Ivory Coast)*, Ismaila Coulibaly *(Mali)*, Anis Ben Slimane *(Tunisia)*
TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR: Yves Bissouma *(Mali)*, Pape Matar Sarr *(Senegal)*
WEST HAM UNITED: Said Benrahma *(Algeria)*, Mohammed Kudus *(Ghana)*, Maxwel Cornet *(Ivory Coast)*, Nayef Aguerd *(Morocco)*
WOLVERHAMPTON WANDERERS: Rayan Ait-Nouri *(Algeria)*, Boubacar Traore *(Mali)*

LIGUE 1

BREST: Billal Brahimi *(Algeria)*, Kamory Doumbia *(Mali)*, Achraf Dari *(Morocco)*
CLERMONT: Mehdi Zeffane *(Algeria)*, Jeremie Bela *(Angola)*, Alidu Seidu *(Ghana)*, Habib Keita *(Mali)*, Mory Diaw *(Senegal)*
LE HAVRE: Mohamed Bayo *(Guinea)*
LENS: Salis Abdul Samed *(Ghana)*, Morgan Guilavogui *(Guinea)*, Massadio Haidara *(Mali)*, Nampalys Mendy *(Senegal)*
LILLE: Adam Ounas, Akim Zedadka *(both Algeria)*
LORIENT: Darlin Yongwa *(Cameroon)*, Gedeon Kalulu *(DR Congo)*, Dembo Sylla *(Guinea)*, Bamba Dieng, Alfred Gomis, Formose Mendy *(all Senegal)*, Montassar Talbi *(Tunisia)*
LYON: Ernest Nuamah *(Ghana)*, Mama Balde *(Guinea-Bissau)*, Sinaly Diomande *(Ivory Coast)*
MARSEILLE: Simon Ngapandouetnbu *(Cameroon)*, Chancel Mbemba *(DR Congo)*, Amine Harit, Azzedine Ounahi *(both Morocco)*, Pape Gueye, Iliman Ndiaye, Ismaila Sarr *(all Senegal)*,
METZ: Alexandre Oukidja, Kevin van den Kerkhof *(both Algeria)*, Ablie Jallow *(Gambia)*, Fali Cande *(Guinea-Bissau)*, Habib Maiga, Jean N'Guessan *(both Ivory Coast)*, Lamine Camara, Pape Amadou Diallo *(both Senegal)*
MONACO: Mohammed Salisu *(Ghana)*, Wilfried Singo *(Ivory Coast)*, Mohamed Camara *(Mali)*, Krepin Diatta, Ismail Jakobs *(both Senegal)*
MONTPELLIER: Enzo Tchato *(Cameroon)*, Dimitry Bertaud *(DR Congo)*, Issiaga Sylla *(Guinea)*, Boubakar Kouyate, Falaye Sacko *(both Mali)*
NANTES: Jaouen Hadjam *(Algeria)*, Jean-Charles Castelletto, Ignatius Ganago *(both Cameroon)*, Samuel Moutoussamy *(DR Congo)*, Mostafa Mohamed *(Egypt)*, Moses Simon *(Nigeria)*
NICE: Youcef Atal, Badredine Bouanani, Hicham Boudaoui *(all Algeria)*, Jeremie Boga *(Ivory Coast)*, Terem Moffi *(Nigeria)*
PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN: Achraf Hakimi *(Morocco)*
REIMS: Adama Bojang *(Gambia)*, Ibrahim Diakite *(Guinea)*, Emmanuel Agbadou, Oumar Diakite *(both Ivory Coast)*, Yunis Abdelhamid, Amir Richardson *(both Morocco)*
RENNES: Amine Gouiri *(Algeria)*, Christopher Wooh *(Cameroon)*
STRASBOURG: Saidou Sow *(Guinea)*, Jean-Eudes Aholou, Abakar Sylla *(both Ivory Coast)*, Ibrahima Sissoko *(Mali)*, Lebogang Mothiba *(South Africa)*
TOULOUSE: Mamady Bangre *(Burkina Faso)*, Frank Magri *(Cameroon)*, Logan Costa *(Cape Verde)*, Moussa Diarra *(Mali)*, Zakaria Aboukhlal *(Morocco)*

SERIE A

ATALANTA: El Bilal Toure *(Mali)*, Ademola Lookman *(Nigeria)*
BOLOGNA: Oussama El Azzouzi *(Morocco)*
CAGLIARI: Zito Luvumbo *(Angola)*, Ibrahim Sulemana *(Ghana)*
EMPOLI: Emmanuel Gyasi *(Ghana)*, Youssef Maleh *(Morocco)*, Tyronne Ebuehi *(Nigeria)*
FIORENTINA: M'Bala Nzola *(Angola)*, Alfred Duncan *(Ghana)*, Christian Kouame *(Ivory Coast)*
FROSINONE: Walid Cheddira *(Morocco)*
GENOA: Caleb Ekuban *(Ghana)*
LECCE: Ahmed Touba *(Algeria)*, Hamza Rafia *(Tunisia)*, Lameck Banda *(Zambia)*
MILAN: Ismael Bennacer *(Algeria)*, Samuel Chukwueze *(Nigeria)*
MONZA: Jose Machin *(Equatorial Guinea)*, Jean-Daniel Akpa Akpro *(Ivory Coast)*
NAPOLI: Andre-Frank Zambo Anguissa *(Cameroon)*, Victor Osimhen *(Nigeria)*
ROMA: Houssem Aouar *(Algeria)*, Evan Ndicka *(Ivory Coast)*
SALERNITANA: Jovane Cabral *(Cape Verde)*, Lassana Coulibaly *(Mali)*, Simeon Nwankwo *(Nigeria)*, Boulaye Dia *(Senegal)*, Dylan Bronn *(Tunisia)*
SASSUOLO: Pedro Obiang *(Equatorial Guinea)*
TORINO: Koffi Djidji *(Ivory Coast)*, Demba Seck *(Senegal)*
UDINESE: Enzo Ebosse *(Cameroon)*, Hassane Kamara *(Ivory Coast)*, Adam Masina *(Morocco)*, Maduka Okoye, Isaac Success *(both Nigeria)*
VERONA: Martin Hongla *(Cameroon)*

6 of the best

Ones to watch in Ivory Coast

Mark Gleeson picks out some of the stars to keep an eye on at the 2023 AFCON finals

1 Oumar DIAKITE
IVORY COAST

After years of searching for a successor to national team record scorer Didier Drogba, the Ivorians might finally have found their man.

The teenager from ASEC Abidjan moved to Red Bull Salzburg in 2022 and spent last season at their satellite club FC Liefering in the Austrian second division, where he consistently rattled in the goals – enough to convince Reims to sign him for a reported €2.5 million at the start of the season and for the Ivory Coast to hand him a first cap – against Lesotho in September – while still only 19.

Diakite's lightning speed is his primary weapon but he is also technically astute. He took only four games before he found the net in Ligue 1 and looks to be a shrewd purchase.

2 Ben NJONGOUE ELLIOTT
CAMEROON

After making his senior Cameroon debut as a substitute in a 2-2 friendly draw with Mexico in June this year, the Chelsea academy product is finally getting first-team action at Reading. He joined the League One outfit on a three-year deal in the summer, and turned 21 in November. His mother is English but his father is from Cameroon, and Elliott attaches the surname Njongoue when on national team duty for the Indomitable Lions.

He may be slight in stature, but the midfielder has already made a big impression on coach Rigobert Song, who gave him more time as a substitute in friendlies against Russia and Senegal, where he was brimming with confidence and did not look out of place in the rigours of the international game.

3 Bongokuhle HLONGWANE
SOUTH AFRICA

Minnesota United spotted tall forward Hlongwane via internet-based scouting programmes before sending someone to watch him play in the flesh for struggling South African club Maritzburg United.

His transition to Major League Soccer was not easy but this year, under the guidance of ex-Everton midfielder and recently-departed coach Adrian Heath, he has proven a regular scorer. In total he hit 17 goals in all competitions, including seven in the Leagues Cup (played between MLS and Liga MX clubs), finishing second in the scoring charts behind Lionel Messi.

For South Africa, he tends to be picked ahead of Burnley's Lyle Foster in the pecking order.

4 Serhou GUIRASSY
GUINEA

Breaking records and keeping pace with Harry Kane, Guinea are hoping Guirassy takes his Bundesliga form to the Cup of Nations finals in the Ivory Coast. A total of 13 goals surpassed Robert Lewandowski to record the highest-ever Bundesliga goals tally after seven games of a new season, and he netted for Guinea too when they played Brazil in mid-year in Barcelona.

Born in the French city of Arles to Guinean parents 27 years ago, Guirassy was Laval's youngest-ever signing at 17 and has also played at Lille, Auxerre, Amiens and Rennes in France and at Cologne in Germany.

Despite scoring 11 goals across various youth categories for France, Guirassy chose to represent Guinea last year, scoring against Egypt in the AFCON qualifiers.

5 Yankuba MINTEH
GAMBIA

The 19-year-old scored the goal that rallied the comeback for the Gambia against Congo in earthquake-hit Marrakesh and saw them go on to draw their last qualifier, thereby usurping their opponents for a place in the Cup of Nations finals.

Minteh is a man who knows how to make an impression: his debut at the highest level in Denmark was for Odense v Copenhagen in September 2022, coming on in the 83rd minute and scoring the winner less than three minutes later.

Moving to Feyenoord this season on loan from Newcastle, whom he joined in the summer, he has also quickly won over the fans in Rotterdam and been thrust into Champions League action by coach Arne Slot, who is predicting big things from the lanky forward.

6 Amir RICHARDSON
MOROCCO

The midfielder won his first cap in September and has since added to them as he looks to forge a place in Morocco's AFCON squad. He came through the ranks after switching his international allegiance from France, where he was born, and next year he will likely be a key component of Morocco's U23 side at the Olympics, having helped the North Africans to qualify.

His mother is Moroccan, but he could also have played for the United States though his father Micheal Ray Richardson, a four-time NBA All Star that played for the New York Knicks and Golden State Warriors, and from whom the 21-year-old gets his 6ft 5in height from.

Facetoface

SEBASTIEN DESABRE

"We are building a project"

Democratic Republic of Congo's head coach looks ahead to the AFCON finals

Can you tell us about the potential of your DR Congo side?
The potential for Congo is very good. We have quite a lot of players who are competing with clubs in the major leagues in Europe. This is as a result of a project we started more than a year ago now, to strengthen the side with players from tougher and more competitive leagues and, on the back of that, we were able to qualify for the Africa Cup of Nations finals. It's a first step and now we wait to see what the future holds.

As I had been saying for quite some time, we are building a project. We know that in any case, in today's football, positive results can allow us to go faster in what we want to do. Good results lead to a lot of positive things. It's work, football changes everywhere from one day to the next. But I must say I've been very satisfied with the state of mind displayed by the players.

What are your chances at the tournament in the Ivory Coast?
Our objective is to get to the quarter-finals. That is where we want to finish. But you must not forget that at the last Cup of Nations finals in Cameroon, Congo did not even qualify so we have to be realistic about our chances and look at this as a mission that we have to take step by step. It's a tough group we have.

What did you think of Morocco's performance in Qatar, and do you think they are favourites to win the African title?
No doubt, they are a very good team and we have to face them in our group. It is amazing how all of Africa are very proud of what they did at the last World Cup finals in Qatar; getting to the semi-finals was a real boost for everyone. For sure, that has to make them the grand favourites for the tournament in the Ivory Coast.

What about the other two teams in your 2023 Africa Cup of Nations group, Tanzania and Zambia?
I know Tanzania well because I worked next door as national team coach in Uganda and we played against them regularly. What they have in their favour is that they've played with the same side for many years now and the consistency paid off for them when they qualified for these finals.

Zambia is a team of enormous potential and I think it's the right time for them now to show their quality with all the young, exciting youngsters that they have. Frankly, I think they are both good teams, so it's not going to be easy at all for us in the tournament if we are to reach our objective of getting past the first round.

Qualification for the 2026 World Cup kicked off in November – good preparation for the AFCON finals. What is your opinion of your qualifying group?
With ten games in our group it's like a mini championship. Senegal are obviously favourites but Mauritania, Togo, Sudan and South Sudan won't be easy either. We believe we could go to the next World Cup but, as I said, Senegal are the favourites. They have a very competent team but I think it would be fair to say we are challengers. We have the potential to do well in this group.

If clubs like TP Mazembe, Vita Club and DC Motema Pembe are successful in African club competitions, is that of benefit to the national team?
It used to be that we would have two to three players from each of the top local teams in our squad, but over the last two to three years the standards of the clubs has dipped enormously with all of the problems that they have had. [The domestic league] hasn't finished inside the schedule and there have been all sorts of other problems. It has also meant that most of the best players have left for other clubs elsewhere outside of the country, and that means that the level of the Congolese league has gone down. I hope the Congolese football federation start to do something about that. I feel they need to start something new all over again. We are finding that our best hope for the national team is with players who are based overseas.

In your last Cup of Nations qualifier, you were again able to play in Kinshasa after renovations to the stadium saw it passed fit for use by CAF and FIFA...
The players were impatiently awaiting the opportunity to reunite with the Kinshasa public – it'd been a long time since there were home matches at the Martyrs stadium. The message to them was simple: we need the public, we know the strength of the 12th man in Kinshasa and the supporters had to push the players. We were happy that we won that game against Sudan to make them happy and also to qualify.

On a personal level, there was criticism of you that you were in charge of too many of the Congolese teams – the national side, the home-based squad for the African Nations Championship and the Under-23 side...
I didn't have the same complaint as them, it's strange! There are players who are coming through the ranks, moving up through their teams and who require in-depth work at some point. It's important that this in-depth work is done. You have to give yourself time to get things done correctly. My presence with the different selections is important and it is part of my work. I think it's better to be there than to be elsewhere!

Interview by Mark Gleeson

5 Asian Cup talking points

Asian football expert John Duerden takes a look at the burning issues ahead of the finals in Qatar

Tournament hosts Qatar aim to eradicate memories of World Cup catastrophe

The 2022 World Cup was a disaster on the pitch for the host nation with three defeats out of three. Now there is a chance to put a smile back on the faces of fans.

Given what happened on home soil last time there is not much confidence that the Maroons can successfully defend the title they won so impressively back in 2019, but with home advantage, more experience and Carlos Queiroz at the helm, Qatar could go deep into the tournament.

The arrival of Queiroz in February showed that Qatar were looking for a more pragmatic approach, which is as much about securing a first World Cup qualification (via the traditional route) in 2026 as it is about the Asian Cup. October's 4-0 defeat to Queiroz's former team Iran, though, was not a good omen.

The stars of five years ago have not kicked on to go and play at the top levels of European football but the likes of Akram Afif and Almoez Ali, who looked world-beating in attack five years ago, should now be approaching their peak.

Hosts...Qatar need to bounce back from World Cup disappointment

Klinsmann's moment of truth

Reaction was mixed last February when Jurgen Klinsmann, who has barely coached since leaving the United States in 2016, was handed the South Korea job, and it grew worse after five games without a win. As criticism grew, the German boss repeatedly asked to be judged on the Asian Cup – and he will be.

The biggest issue so far has been the lack of time he has spent in the country – just 67 days in his first seven months was the calculation – while press conferences have been done via Zoom from his California home. His justification has been to suggest that critics simply don't understand how modern international football works.

An uptick in results – albeit against weaker opponents – has helped and, with European-based stars shining in the big leagues, the Koreans can't be counted out. If, however, Klinsmann does not come close to capturing a first Asian Cup since 1960 for the Taegeuk Warriors, the knives will be out and sharper than before.

Under pressure...South Korea coach Jurgen Klinsmann

New coach...Roberto Mancini looks on during Saudi Arabia's September defeat to South Korea

Mancini looking to reverse Saudi Arabian downturn

Roberto Mancini knows how to win continental competitions but has had little time to prepare since leaving European champions Italy for Saudi Arabia in August. The 3-1 loss to Mali in October was a ninth defeat in 11 games since that victory over Argentina at the World Cup.

Some of the opponents have been decent but there have been issues at both ends of the pitch to the extent that some figures have come out and said that supporters should forget about a fourth title and Mancini should focus on 2026.

That is going too far. The Italian may have had little time with his new charges, but the Green Falcons are made up of players from just a handful of clubs all based at home and will have plenty of time to prepare before it all starts. A return to Qatar is also comfortable for the team and easy for the fans who will travel in numbers once again.

Time for Uzbekistan to shed choking tag

Anyone who follows Asian football closely has been waiting for Uzbekistan to join the ranks of the big boys since the last millennium, but the Central Asians have become known as the continent's chokers – and further credence was added to that argument after the White Wolves lost 1-0 to Iran on home soil in the final of the inaugural Central Asian Football Association (CAFA) Nations Cup earlier this summer.

At some levels, however, they have shown they can win. In March, the Under-20s team became Asian champions, going one better than the Under-23s from 2022, while the youngsters also performed admirably at the Under-20 World Cup earlier this summer, reaching the knockout rounds. The talent is clearly there.

As well as that young talent, there is coach Srecko Katanec. The man who took Slovenia to the 2002 World Cup knows Asia well after past spells in charge of United Arab Emirates and Iraq, where he showed an ability to organise teams while trying to build tactical flexibility going forward.

In Uzbekistan, the signs are that it is working. Recent results have been encouraging. A 3-3 draw with Mexico in the United States went down well as did victories over Vietnam and China. Belief is growing that this could finally be the team's time.

Bright future...Uzbekistan's youngsters celebrate winning the Under-20 Asian Cup in March

Southeast Asia ready to challenge

For the first time since 2007 there are four Southeast Asian teams. Back then Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand and Malaysia were co-hosts but this time they all came through qualification.

Thailand and Vietnam have been top dogs in the region for some time and will be eyeing a place in the knockout stages. That would be dreamland for the other two who have never got past the group phase and have just three wins between them in the history of the Asian Cup.

Indonesia have an improving young team that qualified impressively with a 2-1 win in Kuwait to clinch their spot under coach Shin Tae-yong. Malaysia also have an experienced South Korean boss in Kim Pan-gon.

With only eight of the 24 teams eliminated in the groups, there is a chance for Malaysia, especially after a favourable draw. Assuming South Korea finish top, they won't be scared of Jordan or Bahrain. Meanwhile Indonesia will likely have to pip Iraq and Vietnam to finish behind Japan.

6 of the best Ones to watch in Qatar

John Duerden picks out some of the stars to keep an eye on at the 2023 Asian Cup

1 Marselino FERDINAN
INDONESIA

The 19-year-old midfielder is the wonderkid of Indonesian football and one of the few players from the entire Southeast Asian region at a European club, namely KMSK Deinze in the Belgian second tier. Fans back home are proud that he has gone, but miss seeing his mazy dribbling and spectacular shots on a regular basis.

It's not easy being something of a prodigy in Indonesia: the country loves football perhaps more than any other in Asia, but its population of almost 300 million are desperate for any glint of success. Expectations and pressure are high, but the early signs are that the teenager can handle it. Playing against Japan, a nation that produces talented youngsters by the bucketload, should give him an idea of how far he has to go.

2 Abdukodir KHUSANOV
UZBEKISTAN

When South Korea's Kim Min-jae told *World Soccer* in November's edition how he hopes to open doors for Asian centre-backs to follow in his footsteps to the top of the European game, the Bayern Munich man could have been talking about this teenage Tashkent-born centre-back. The 19-year-old made his international debut in June and then did the same for Lens in September.

A physically imposing defender, Khusanov arrived in northern France from Belarus where he impressed with his intelligence and reading of the game as well as his ball-playing ability. Uzbekistan coach Srecko Katanec is a fan and, although he has talked of the need to be patient, Khusanov will be ready at the Asian Cup.

3 Keito NAKAMURA
JAPAN

The 23-year-old scored four goals in his first four international games in 2023, proving that Japan have another talented attacker in their squad. That was apparent to those that saw Nakamura impress for LASK in Austria for two seasons before making the move to Reims in France earlier this summer.

The former Gamba Osaka star, who has also had loan spells in Belgium and the Netherlands, can play on either wing or behind the striker. There is plenty of competition for places in the Japan XI, but the signs are that he has a very bright international career ahead. He may not be able to maintain his early goalscoring rate, but he makes things happen in the final third regardless.

4 Zidane IQBAL
IRAQ

The former Manchester United midfielder has been battling injury but hopes to be fit to try and help Iraq repeat their 2007 Asian Cup triumph.

Iqbal, born not far from Old Trafford, impressed at youth level for the club and looked likely to make the jump from academy to first-team squad regular after Erik ten Hag arrived. But it didn't quite work out and he left in the summer to join Utrecht in the Netherlands in search of more regular playing time.

With his transfer fee reported to be €1 million, the 20-year-old is already one of the more expensive Asian players. Silky and skilful, Iqbal idolised Mesut Ozil and has been a role model for British Asians. Technically excellent, he could be a mainstay for years to come.

5 Shahrom SAMIEV
TAJIKISTAN

The attacker is still just 22 but has already had a nomadic career playing in his native Tajikistan (Istiklol), Russia (Rubin Kazan), Belarus (Isloch Minsk Raion and Torpedo-BelAZ Zhodino) and Moldova, where he currently plies his trade at Milsami Orhei. At the same time, he has been quietly impressing for his national team, playing a part in the King's Cup triumph in Thailand in 2022 and the winning of the Merdeka Cup in Malaysia a year later.

Hard working, excellent in the air, and with a habit of arriving at the right place and time to nod the ball home, Samiev has bags of self-belief to go with his physical presence. He has yet to make his mark on Asian football and there is no better time or place than this January in Qatar.

6 LEE Kang-in
SOUTH KOREA

The 22-year-old only secured a regular starting spot in the senior team after joining PSG in the summer. Most think that it took too long, but Jurgen Klinsmann was quick to hang his team's creative hat on this skilful midfielder who has already had quite a career.

Lee's first goals for the Taegeuk Warriors came against Tunisia in October and it seems like Son Heung-min has a rival for free-kick taking duties. He has a great eye for a pass and is one of the most exciting talents in Asian football, and January could be the time when he really announces his arrival on the continental stage.

PAULINE BREMER

"We have everything to be a big club"

The Germany international tells *World Soccer* why she left last season's Champions League finalists Wolfsburg for Brighton & Hove Albion in one of the summer's more intriguing transfers

In your final match action of last season you almost equalised in the Champions League final, now you're at Brighton. What motivated you to make this move?
I think [Brighton] is a really good project to be involved in and I was looking for a new challenge. I had a good time at Wolfsburg. I was always playing for clubs that went for titles; here we have something to build. It is a good challenge for me to come into an environment and build something and be seen as a leader on the pitch, with a new team and an ambitious club. It is good to share my experience on the pitch as well as off the pitch – I am really enjoying that process so far. It is fun to be out there with so many talented, passionate players.

How were you convinced to sign?
We were talking for a long time. All the people I talked to – the manager [Melissa Phillips, previously assistant coach at NWSL club Angel City and manager at London City Lionesses], the board – they were convincing as to how they wanted to build the team up. The facilities speak for themselves: we have everything to be a big club.

You've been at big clubs – Turbine Potsdam, Lyon, Manchester City and Wolfsburg – how does Brighton's new £8.5 million training base compare?
At Wolfsburg and Manchester City we had good facilities, [but] Brighton is one step further. With everything, the spa and so on, everything is a little bit bigger. We have also played a game at the Amex, which was a really nice experience for us. It was good to get in the big stadium. We are getting good crowds and you can feel the progression.

What are the club's targets?
We have our big club vision, we want to be in the top four of the WSL, but we recognise it is a process to get there. Of course, we want as many points as possible. It will not be made overnight, but we strive for the upper half of the table.

You had an injury-hit spell at Manchester City, making only 18 league appearances from 2017 to 2020. Do you feel you have unfinished business with English football?
I don't really look back too much, I like to look forward to the future and I think the WSL is a really good league to play in as it is so competitive and professional, which is also why I chose this club.

Even at Wolfsburg you suffered injury issues. Does joining Brighton feel like a new chapter, where you can leave that behind and focus on football?
That's the plan. I do not want to be that injured player anymore. It has been good to have that full pre-season and really get fit. I feel really good right now. I don't have any issues – I hope it stays like that.

How big an attraction was the competitiveness of the WSL?
All the smaller clubs invest in women's football. The league is even more competitive than when I was here before and it will get more competitive. My team is a different one so it changes the way you approach the games, but all the games are tough. You can't make any mistakes as you get punished.

It is really interesting to see how it develops after the World Cup when England did a good job. There is that interest in women's football, we need to make sure we bring the level up on the pitch and then everything around it will come.

If England's performance at the World Cup should have a good impact, will Germany's poor performance have a negative one?
It is a problem now. I hope the interest in women's football will not break down again. It all comes with success. You could feel that last year in the Euros when Germany got to the final. Everyone was really excited about it. You could feel it in the stadiums and the season after there were loads of fans. I hope they will continue to come and watch women's football, even though the success wasn't there. For us players it is important to have that support around, that interest and the fans in the stadium.

You've spent a lot of your career outside Germany. Do you like being abroad?
I like it. It is really interesting. I haven't been homesick. I felt when I came back to Wolfsburg it was a big difference for me, even talking in German I am a different person. You can develop your personality. Being open to other cultures, speaking to other people, they have a different perspective. I think it is really beneficial. I am really glad I had the opportunity to go abroad.

Do you tell your German team-mates to play abroad?
I am always encouraging people to go abroad, to find out more about other people but also about yourself. But it is not for everyone, if you are someone who likes to be home, who likes their family, you cannot force it. It is who you are as a person.

Do you still have international ambitions yourself?
Of course, the national team is always a big honour. I spoke to the national team coaches about joining Brighton and they were really happy as they know the league is really competitive. They will watch the games in Germany. But I am only focused on the club right now, everything else will come.

Interview by Glenn Moore

AMERICAN
EXPRESS

Glenn Moore

Growing pains for the Women's Champions League

Early eliminations throw up questions for UEFA as the 2023-24 group stage begins

Imagine the groans in the boardrooms of broadcaster DAZN, sponsors and UEFA itself when four of the biggest names in the Women's Champions League were knocked out before the competition even began.

Arsenal, Manchester United, Juventus and last season's finalists Wolfsburg all failed to negotiate the treacherous qualifiers of the league pathway, leading to a group stage line-up that will have frustrated many – but also posed some existential questions for the sport.

Growth is the aim, but whose growth, and how? Does Europe want breadth, a steady pan-continental rise in standards, or depth within silos of excellence? That might lift the whole sport – but could also lead to an ersatz super league, detached from the wider game except to suck in its brightest and best.

To attract larger audiences, more fans and sponsors, women's football needs the big club brands, who also have the funds to invest in wages, facilities and development, thereby further growing the game. But that means a concentration of talent, wealth and success in the big teams of the big leagues, much as it has done in the men's game. It is often said women's football should not simply follow the men's, that as a relatively new sport it can avoid the mistakes and forge its own path, but that's easier said than done when the same well-funded clubs are involved in both gender branches.

Yet to many growing the sport means growing it everywhere, which in Champions League terms means maintaining the champions pathway through which the likes of Brann from Norway and Austria's St Polten qualified. It is not as if this is that esoteric a route – household names Ajax, Benfica and Roma also progressed from that path, along with Rosengard – semi-finalists in 2004, and Slavia Prague.

The latter are the only club from a nation behind what was once dubbed the Iron Curtain to make the group stage. Indeed, the Czech team are also the only such club to have made the quarter-finals since the now defunct Russian outfit Rossiyanka in 2012-13.

However, aside from these two, Eastern European sides have rarely made much impact in the women's game. More noticeable, as money comes into the sport, is the squeezing out of Scandinavian clubs, which were once so prominent.

In their place are the Spanish and English, joining the French and German clubs who have always dominated the competition. Few would bet against this being the fifth season in succession that seven of the last eight come from those four countries.

> "We want the best teams in the Champions League, not just a spread of some average teams"
>
> Manchester United Women's manager Marc Skinner

Yet even those leagues are unhappy with the format, with its high risk of failing to make the group stage after investing in a squad deep enough to contend.

Knocked out... Marc Skinner and Ella Toone react after Manchester United's exit

Both Arsenal, semi-finalists last year, and Wolfsburg, quarter-finalists at least for the past 11 seasons, were knocked out by Paris FC. Juventus went down to Eintracht Frankfurt and Manchester United lost to Paris Saint-Germain in a battle of heavyweights – a fixture that led United manager Marc Skinner to complain about the qualifying structure.

"It's crazy that we have to play PSG in this qualifying round. Crazy," he said. "It needs to be something that's addressed.

"There are teams going through to [the group stage] that are not good enough. Our standard is better than that standard. We want the best teams in the Champions League, not just a spread of some average teams."

Skinner's comments – for which he later apologised for "any offence caused" – drew considerable criticism, including from Chelsea manager Emma Hayes who said: "I think that's ignorant and arrogant for us [English clubs] to say that," noting that Chelsea had to endure several early exits before finally going deep in the competition. Hayes did agree that the format needed looking at, but added: "The smaller nations deserve the opportunity and have the right to be in it as much as any English team does."

There are unlikely to be any changes until the end of next season, as media and sponsorship deals run to 2025, but discussions are already underway as to how the format can be tweaked.

One solution, mentioned by Hayes, is to expand the group stages, though whether the depth is there to expand to 32 teams is doubtful. Instead, perhaps there could be a 24-club version using

Upset...Louise Fleury of Paris FC celebrates scoring against Wolfsburg in Champions League qualifying

a version of the Swiss system that will be seen in the men's competition from 2024, with direct entry to the women's group stage doubled from four to eight.

Another option would be to have a secondary competition, a Women's Europa League. This may be more beneficial in that the growing rewards of the Champions League can be unhealthy for domestic leagues as they entrench the advantage of champions.

For example, reaching the group stage from the first qualifying round was worth £500,000 last season with each point gained in the group just under £15,000 extra. Even a modest campaign, such as the four points St Polten won last year, earned £560,000. By contrast, Sturm Graz, the Austrian runners-up, went into the much harder league pathway, were drawn against Real Madrid and thrashed 6-0. Their earnings were £56,000.

St Polten have won the last eight Austrian titles and at the time of writing were yet to drop a point this season.

It would also benefit the bigger leagues, which have also had their competitive balance skewed by both the Champions League's prize money and the advantages it confers in attracting fans, sponsors and players – including US internationals. Providing European football opportunities to ambitious clubs such as Aston Villa, Hoffenheim and Atletico Madrid could help address that, and persuade their parent men's clubs to keep investing in them.

For years the challenge in women's football was to grow the game. Now it is to manage that growth for the widest benefit. That may prove even harder.

Round-up

Copa Libertadores winners...Corinthians

CORINTHIANS TRIUMPH AGAIN

Corinthians won their fourth Copa Libertadores Femenina when they beat Palmeiras 1-0 in Santiago de Cali with a goal from Millene. Colombia staged the fortnight-long, 16-club competition and provided the only non-Brazilian semi-finalists in the merged Atletico Nacional/Formas Intimas team. But daytime weekday kick-offs led to poor attendances and a lack of home interest meant only 3,580 attended the Saturday final.

STONEY LEADS WAVE TO SHIELD

San Diego Wave won the NWSL shield, the regular season title, in only their second campaign. Casey Stoney's side finished two points clear of Portland Thorns and also topped the attendance rankings with a 20,718 average. A full review, including the NWSL play-offs, will follow in next month's issue.

GERMANY PART WAYS WITH VOSS-TECKLENBURG

Martina Voss-Tecklenburg left her role as Germany head coach by mutual consent.

The national team had been in limbo ever since their shock elimination at the group stage of the 2023 World Cup, with Voss-Tecklenburg on extended sick leave.

Assistant coach Britta Carlson deputised for the first round of Nations League games - during which Germany lost to Denmark and beat Iceland – then was replaced as interim coach by veteran Horst Hrubesch, who oversaw victories over Wales and Iceland.

Germany exit...Martina Voss-Tecklenburg

World Cup...Jamaica's Deneisha Blackwood and Vyan Sampson celebrate reaching the last 16

JAMAICA'S WORLD CUP PLAYERS STRIKE FOR PAY

A boycott of the CONCACAF W Gold Cup qualifiers by the World Cup squad appears to have forced the Jamaican Football Federation to pay the Reggae Girlz for qualifying and performing at the finals, at which they reached the last 16 for the first time. A shadow squad, under newly appointed interim head coach Xavier Gilbert, took just one point from their two October qualifying games.

ANDONOVSKI GOES HOME TO KANSAS

Former United States head coach Vlatko Andonovski returned to work in his Kansas hometown where he won the NWSL championship with the now defunct Kansas City in 2014 and 2015. Andonovski will coach successor franchise Kansas City Current, who are due to unveil a purpose-built 11,500 capacity, $117m stadium next year.

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***World Soccer*'s January 2024 edition is our annual awards special, focusing on the players, teams and managers who have helped shape the game over the past 12 months.**

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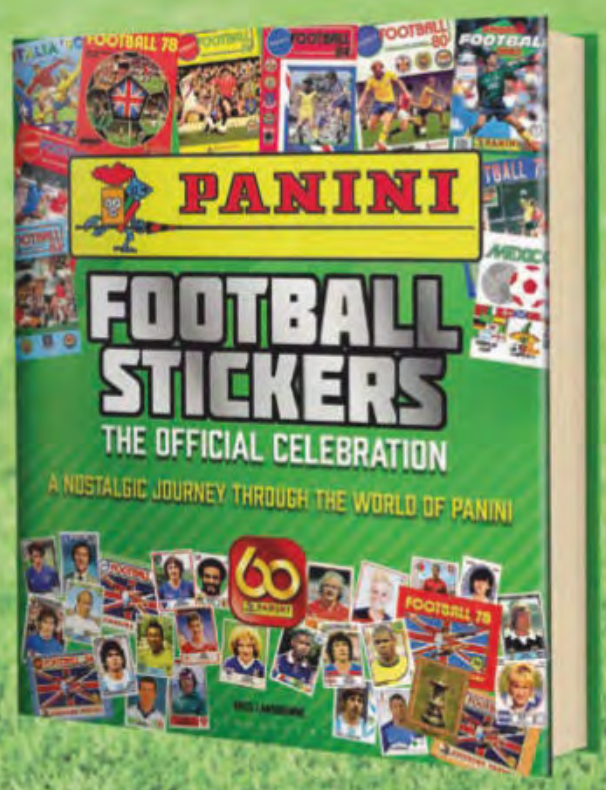

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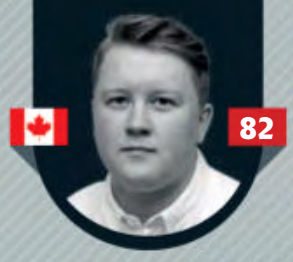

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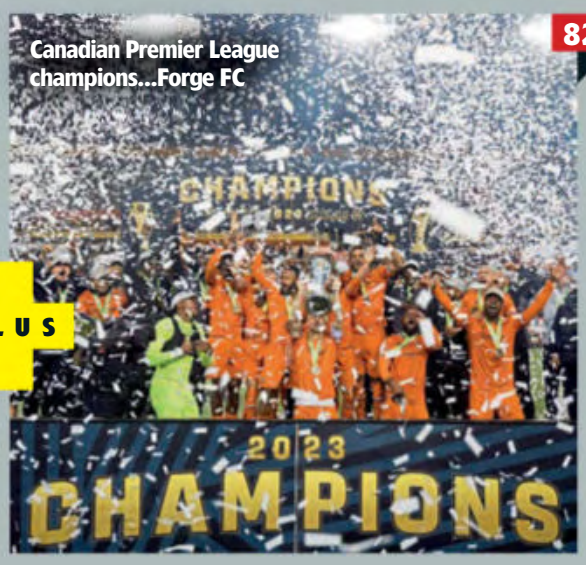

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South America

TIM VICKERY

Cano fires Fluminense to Libertadores glory

Argentine striker helps Fluminense lift their first-ever Copa Libertadores crown, while LDU Quito win the Sudamericana

Review

Star man... Fluminense striker German Cano lifts the Libertadores trophy

The global audience that accompanied South American club football's showpiece occasion appeared divided by what it had seen. Fluminense of Brazil beat Argentina's Boca Juniors 2-1 in Rio's Maracana stadium to win the Copa Libertadores. Those who expected a game of quality seemed disappointed. But those who had tuned in for drama were gripped by a dramatic, sometimes chaotic encounter that ebbed and flowed over 120 minutes. And the tears that flowed on the pitch and in the stands before, during and after the match gave the occasion a level of intensity that some compared favourably with the corporate sterility of Europe's Champions League decider.

And the destiny of the Libertadores was decided by two fine goals, both of which bore the stamp of Fernando Diniz, Fluminense's fascinating coach. The first was a succinct statement of his team's unorthodox attacking approach. Diniz frequently looks to create overloads by moving almost the entire team to one flank. The

Equaliser... Luis Advincula celebrates scoring Boca's only goal

Hero to zero...John Kennedy reacts after being sent off shortly after scoring the winner

two wingers, Jhon Arias and Keno combined down the right and Keno pulled back for Argentine striker German Cano to move intelligently into space and score with a typically efficient one-touch finish. A 35-year-old who has scored goals all across Latin America without previously attracting much attention, Cano has now become a star.

And the title was won in extra-time by Cano's young strike partner, the livewire John Kennedy, who was introduced in the second half. He both started and finished a clever three-man move, beating Sergio Romero with a fiercely struck volley. It was a goal well worthy of winning Fluminense's first Libertadores title from a player in danger of going off the rails who has been tactfully handled by his coach. And it means that Diniz has a senior title – an important moment of consolidation for a coach long seen as a promise, and who has got off to an extremely difficult start in his other role of stand-in boss for the Brazil national team.

In between those vital Cano contributions, though, came a Boca equaliser that should give Diniz nightmares. Protecting their lead in the second half, Fluminense's defensive line kept dropping too deep, almost on top of veteran keeper Fabio. There were a couple of warnings, before Boca right-back Luis Advincula was given far too much space to cut in and plant a shot inside the far corner.

Everything was stacked against Boca. The neutral venue for the final ended up being the home ground of their opponents. Defensive organiser Marcos Rojo was missing through suspension. And, unlike in the previous knockout rounds, extra-time is played in the final. This was a particular obstacle for a team without a single win in six knockout matches, which had fought its way through to the final by winning a succession of penalty shootouts.

Boca knew they would have to run, mark and graft, waiting for their moment to strike. The cool weather worked to their advantage and, with Fluminense leaving John Kennedy on the bench, for most of the game they found it relatively easy to keep Fluminense at bay. It was a match of few chances, and when Fluminense's substitute left-back Diogo Barbosa, on for Marcelo, wasted a wonderful chance with the last kick of normal time, Boca believed they had a real chance.

A 35-year-old who has scored goals all across Latin America without previously attracting much attention, Cano has now become a star

Opportunity knocked for them after Kennedy put Fluminense back in front. He went into the crowd to celebrate, picking up a second yellow card in the process. But Boca blew their chance. Experienced left-back Frank Fabra got himself stupidly sent off and, without a man advantage, Boca lacked the flair to conjure up a second equaliser.

Fluminense comfortably survived an aerial barrage to claim their first title – a fifth consecutive win for Brazilian clubs. This is an unprecedented run of supremacy in 64 years of Libertadores history, and should perhaps be the cause of unease at CONMEBOL, South America's confederation. It is hard to see how the rest of the continent can compete.

At least the winner of the Copa Sudamericana, the Europa League equivalent, comes from a different country. For the second year in a row, a Brazilian team went down in the final to opposition from Ecuador. Fortaleza, from Brazil's North East, met LDU, or Liga of Quito, from the Ecuadorian capital. The game took place in Uruguay, leaving both sets of supporters with epic journeys. The venue was changed from Montevideo's Centenario stadium to a much smaller ground down the coast at Maldonado. And it was a sad journey back home for the Brazilians. After a 1-1 draw Fortaleza were ahead in the shootout, and were a kick away from the title. But gangling Ecuadorian keeper Alexander Dominguez was the hero of the hour, deciding matters for his side and preventing a Brazilian clean sweep.

Dismissed...Boca left-back Frank Fabra sees red

Africa

MARK GLEESON

Preview

New faces & familiar favourites in African Champions League

Big guns line up to compete against debutants for African club football's top prize, while the CAF Confederation Cup is also ready to begin

Football in Mauritania has made significant strides over the last few years, first with the national team qualifying for the Africa Cup of Nations in 2019 and since securing a berth for a third successive finals in January.

A natural extension of that progress is FC Nouadhibou reaching the group stage of this season's African Champions League, one of three newcomers in the 16-team field for the league phase. It is the first time a club from Mauritania has got this far in the competition.

Nouadhibou, coached by Spaniard Aritz Lopez Garai, convincingly overcame Mali's Real Bamako 4-1 on aggregate to book their spot and are joined in Group A by the other newcomers Pyramids of Egypt, one of the richest clubs on the continent.

They were set up and financed by Saudi billionaire Turki Al Sheikh, who now owns La Liga outfit Almeria. Al Sheikh has since sold Pyramids to Emirati businessman Salem Al Shamsi and the club have continued to challenge the duopoly of Al Ahly and Zamalek in Egyptian club football. In the last five seasons, they finished third three times in a row and then in the two last campaigns were runners-up in the Egyptian league.

Unlike Nouadhibou, Pyramids already have some pedigree in African club competitions. They were Confederation Cup runners-up in the COVID-hit 2019-20 tournament, when they lost 1-0 to Morocco's Renaissance Berkane in the final. Last season, the

Champions League debutants...Medeama won their first-ever Ghanaian title last season

Cairo-based club got to the Confederation Cup quarter-finals and Portuguese Jaime Pacheco has remained as their coach for longer than the tenure of most foreign coaches at north African clubs.

They will share their group with heavily fancied Mamelodi Sundowns, the club of the Confederation of African Football (CAF) president Patrice Motsepe, and TP Mazembe from the Democratic Republic of Congo, who are five-time past Champions League winners but who were embarrassingly eliminated in last season's preliminary rounds by Vipers from Uganda.

Almost half of this year's field have previously won the competition, but it is again likely to be a battle between reigning champions Al Ahly and Wydad Casablanca, who have contested the last two finals, and the ambitious Sundowns, who have been the top performers in the group phase over the last two seasons but then botched it at the business end of the competition.

Al Ahly have been to six of the last seven finals while Wydad have competed in four of the last seven. Sundowns won in 2016 but have not got to the final since – despite competing in the group phase for a ninth successive season.

> It is again likely to be a battle between reigning champions Al Ahly and Wydad Casablanca, who have contested the last two finals, and the ambitious Mamelodi Sundowns

The 11-time champions Al Ahly will play in Group D against Chabab Belouizdad from Algeria, Young Africans of Tanzania and Ghana's Medeama, who have qualified for the group stage for the first time. Medeama won a first league title in June, and under coach Evans Adotey have now broken through in double quick time in the Champions League. Ghana last had a Champions League group-stage representative in 2012, when Berekum Chelsea narrowly missed out on a semi-final place.

As for the Confederation Cup, this year the teams that progress from the group stage will advance straight to the quarter-finals after CAF dispensed with the format that allows teams losing in the Champions League to drop down to the secondary competition.

It means that holders USM Alger have a good opportunity to successfully defend their title, although Zamalek of Egypt are the headline attraction. The Cairo giants, however, were fortunate to progress after scrapping through the second round with a narrow aggregate triumph over opponents Artar Solar from tiny Djibouti.

In both competitions, the group matches will be played from November through to March with the top two teams from the groups advancing to the quarter-finals. The final is played over two legs in May.

Ambitious... Mamelodi Sundowns of South Africa

GROUP STAGE DRAW

CAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

GROUP A
- TP Mazembe
- Pyramids
- FC Nouadhibou
- Mamelodi Sundowns

GROUP B
- Jwaneng Galaxy
- ASEC Abidjan
- Wydad Casablanca
- Simba

GROUP C
- Petro Atletico
- Al Hilal
- Esperance
- Etoile Sahel

GROUP D
- Chabab Belouizdad
- Al Ahly
- Medeama
- Young Africans

CAF CONFEDERATION CUP

GROUP A
- USM Alger
- Future FC
- Al Hilal Benghazi
- SuperSport United

GROUP B
- Sagrada Esperanca
- Zamalek
- SOAR
- Abu Salim

GROUP C
- Academica Lobito
- Dreams FC
- Rivers United
- Club Africain

GROUP D
- Diables Noirs
- Stade Malien
- Renaissance Berkane
- Sekhukhune United

United States

JAMES NALTON

FC Cincinnati head into MLS play-offs in top spot

Big budgets and star names were confounded by good coaching and careful planning in the 2023 Major League Soccer regular season

Supporters' Shield winners ...FC Cincinnati

Five years after FC Cincinnati won a regular season championship in the United Soccer League, the second tier of US Soccer, the club is celebrating the equivalent title in MLS.

This year, Cincinnati claimed MLS's Supporters' Shield — the silverware awarded to the team that finishes top of the overall regular standings across the Eastern and Western Conferences combined.

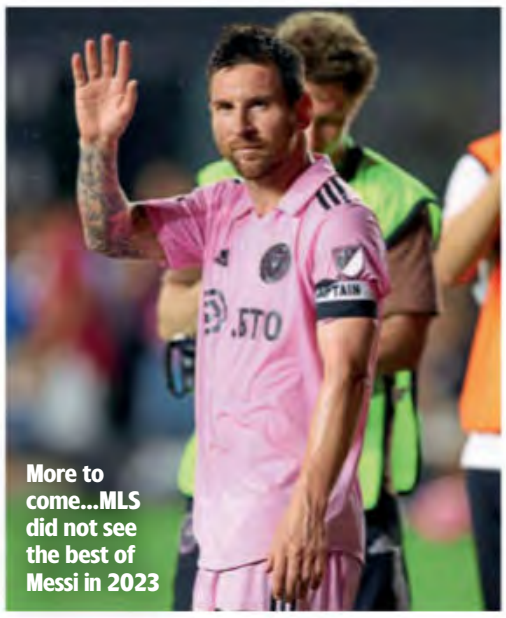
This success marks a complete turnaround for the club since they joined the league in 2019. They were not promoted to MLS because of that USL success in 2018, as there is no system of promotion and relegation between leagues in the Untied States. Like any other new MLS club, Cincinnati joined as an expansion franchise via a successful bid and, in their case, an entry fee of $150 million.

Clubs buy their way into MLS rather than being promoted to it on sporting merit, but Cincinnati's USL regular season triumph in 2018, along with impressive attendances at Division II level, certainly didn't harm their bid and gave them an on-field claim for being deserving of making the step up in 2019.

Once in MLS, Cincinnati spent three seasons as the worst team in the league, finishing bottom of the overall standings each year between 2019 and 2021. A core support garnered during those years in USL served them well through the rough patch, and their rise to become league champions in 2023 owes much to those fans.

The club has undergone a complete turnaround under head coach Pat

Expansion side... St Louis City enjoyed an outstanding debut season



More to come...MLS did not see the best of Messi in 2023

Noonan and general manager Chris Albright, who were both hired from 2020 Supporters' Shield winners Philadelphia Union ahead of the 2022 season in which Cincinnati finished tenth overall.

The Supporters' Shield's place in the hierarchy of US soccer trophies remains a point of discussion. American sporting tradition usually deems the winner of the post-season play-offs – in soccer's case, the MLS Cup – as the team with the right to call themselves champions. Yet as the old adage goes, the league table doesn't lie, and there's no doubt that Cincinnati have been the best team in MLS in 2023.

> As the old adage goes, the league table doesn't lie, and there's no doubt that Cincinnati have been the best team in MLS in 2023

"Even my own opinion of this has changed," said Noonan. "I think the Shield has now surpassed MLS Cup in terms of relevance.

"That's not to take away the desire for our team to hold the MLS Cup trophy, but for that group to be the top team over the course of the season, I think it's very meaningful."

There will be little debate around who has been the best player in MLS in 2023: Cincinnati's attacking midfielder, Luciano "Lucho" Acosta. The Argentine was the clear regular season MVP, finishing with 17 goals and ten assists.

Just as remarkable as Cincinnati's achievement was that of 2023 expansion team St Louis City. Under South African head coach Bradley Carnell, and with a counter-attacking, counter-pressing brand of football, the team finished top of the Western Conference in their first season.

St Louis won their first five games – no expansion side had ever won more than three – and remained in good enough form for the rest of 2023 to become the first expansion side to win their conference. The goals were largely shared around the team, although Brazilian striker Joao Klauss would have challenged for the Golden Boot had he not been struck down by injury after ten goals in his first 15 matches.

Instead, Los Angeles FC's Denis Bouanga claimed the top scorer award with 20, thanks to a six-goal haul in the last three games of the season, which saw him go ahead of the likes of Acosta, Atlanta United's Giorgos Giakoumakis (17 goals), and Cucho Hernandez of Columbus Crew (16).

LAFC went into the season as defending Supporters' Shield and MLS Cup champions, so will be disappointed to only finish third in the west and eighth overall. But they were not the only side to perform way below expectations.

Every year, the MLS Players' Association releases the league's salaries and this year's revealed the top spenders on salary were Inter Miami, Toronto FC and LA Galaxy. All three failed miserably, finishing in the bottom two of their respective conferences, with Toronto bottom of the overall standings.

Miami's salary spend was, of course, heavily inflated by the late-season addition of Lionel Messi. The 2023 Ballon d'Or winner helped them win the Leagues Cup – a victory which sees them qualify for the 2024 CONCACAF Champions Cup (the newly-formatted Champions League) – and finish runners-up in the US Open Cup, but injuries and international call-ups restricted his availability and prevented him from having an impact in MLS.

Fellow Floridians Orlando City, meanwhile, had the lowest salary spend in MLS but were still the league's second-best team, finishing six points behind Cincinnati. Getting so much from a limited budget is a testament to Oscar Pareja, who was a standout coach in the league along with Noonan and Carnell. American forward Duncan McGuire was in and out of Orlando's starting XI but still managed 13 goals.

In a year when MLS was focused heavily on its new broadcast deal with Apple TV and the subsequent arrival of Messi to drive subscriptions and boost attendances, in the end it was an unlikely team from Ohio and their own Argentine star, already seasoned in American soccer, who impressed the most.

Underachievers... Toronto finished bottom with one of the biggest budgets in MLS

Canada

DANNY LEWIS

Forge make it four out of five in the CPL

Hamilton-based club continue to dominate the Canadian Premier League

The Canadian Premier League's landmark fifth season saw more history being made, starting with Vancouver FC, who replaced FC Edmonton as the league's eighth team.

While Afshin Ghotbi's side finished in seventh place, there were moments to remember during their maiden campaign. Their first-ever CPL match was a defeat in the British Columbia derby against Pacific FC, decided by a sweet strike from Manny Aparicio, but they collected their first win a week later at York United. Certainly it was a debut campaign with one eye on the future: in total, Ghotbi gave 5,203 minutes to Canadian players under 21, 813 more than any other team in the league. Among them was TJ Tahid, who became the league's youngest-ever goalscorer after notching with a smart turn and finish during another defeat against Pacific at the age of 16 years and 34 days.

Elsewhere, last season's Player of the Year Ollie Bassett stood out again for Atletico Ottawa as he joined Cavalry striker Myer Bevan at the top of the scoring charts with 11 goals. The team didn't enjoy the successes

CPL champions... Forge FC players lift the trophy
Credit: Alamy

Record-breaker ...Vancouver FC starlet TJ Tahid
Credit: Instagram @tj.tahid

Golden Boot winner...Myer Bevan

of their previous season – when they topped the table and reached the CPL final – missing out on the play-offs by two points, despite an expansion that saw five teams included.

York United were the beneficiaries of the extra place, progressing from the regular season for the second time. The Nine Stripes fell at the first hurdle though, after a dramatic 1-0 defeat away to Pacific. The hosts took the lead in the 91st minute via Adonijah Reid, before Paris Gee thought he had scored an acrobatic equaliser – only to be denied by the offside flag.

That win took Pacific into the quarter-finals and a clash with HFX Wanderers, who had finished third to make the play-offs for the second time. An own goal from Zachary Fernandez granted them another 1-0 win and a place in the semi-finals.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the draw, there was a heavyweight clash between the league's top two sides: Cavalry and Forge FC. The victor would go directly to the final, while the loser would get a second bite of the cherry via a clash with Pacific to get there.

Cavalry had the joint-Golden Boot winner, Bevan, as well as Coach of the Year Tommy Wheeldon Jr., Players' Player of the Year Ali Musse, plus Defender and Player of the Year Daan Klomp. They had also won the regular season by 13 points, ending the campaign with a nine-game unbeaten run and recording eight wins in that time.

They faced a Forge side with serious pedigree at this stage of the campaign, having won three of the four CPL finals including last season's against Atletico Ottawa.

Having missed out on last season's final due to suspension, midfielder Kyle Bekker ensured his team reached the showpiece again on this occasion. The Forge captain delivered the corner that resulted in Alessandro Hojabrpour opening the scoring, then finished clinically shortly after half-time to make Joe Mason's late header futile in a 2-1 win.

Cavalry, then, returned to Spruce Meadows a week later to face Pacific with a final place at stake. Musse put in a pinpoint free-kick delivery for Klomp to open the scoring, before finishing off a training-ground corner routine with a deflected shot that went into the bottom corner. Kekuta Manneh responded with a great goal of his own for the Tridents, although it wasn't enough to bring them back into the game as Cavalry set up a rematch with Forge at Tim Hortons Field in Hamilton, Ontario.

Vancouver FC's TJ Tahid became the league's youngest-ever goalscorer after notching against Pacific at the age of 16 years and 34 days

In a league that loves long-range screamers, they were all that were scored in the final – even if fans had to be patient to see them. After 100 minutes of play without a goal, Musse coolly placed his strike out of Triston Henry's reach to spark rapturous celebrations for the away side, but Forge refused to admit defeat.

Beni Badibanga looped an audacious effort over Marco Carducci and into the top corner moments before the break in extra-time. That set the scene for Tristan Borges to provide an even more spectacular winner by scoring directly from a corner, as Forge became the first team to lift the new North Star Cup, win a final at home and come from behind to win a final, while also taking their record to four out of five and entering the 2024 CONCACAF Champions Cup.

China

JOHN DUERDEN

The long road

Encouraging signs for the long-term future of the Chinese game in its post big-spending era, as Shanghai Port lift 2023 league title

After 12 months of the Chinese Super League being held up as a cautionary tale for Saudi Arabia not to follow, the 2023 season ended with much to be positive about. The first season free of COVID-19, lockdown and bubbles since 2019 saw supporters return to stadiums in numbers with an average attendance of close to 20,000, despite the fact that almost all the stars that headed east in the previous decade have long since departed.

Two were left and went head-to-head in the title race. Brazilian midfielder Oscar ended up winning the championship with Shanghai Port, while former Belgium international Marouane Fellaini settled for second with Shandong Taishan. There was quite an exciting climax as Shanghai, who looked to have the trophy in the bag with weeks to go, ended up stumbling over the line in the face of a late run from Shandong.

It was perhaps not a surprise that these are two big clubs who have won titles before and during the Chinese Super League's spending spree of a few years ago. Their past spending was not fuelled – as were the likes of Guangzhou Evergrande and the majority of top tier teams – by big-spending property developer owners who then fell on hard times.

Champions... Shanghai Port

The two contenders met in the penultimate game of the season with Shanghai, five points clear, knowing that a win would secure the title. The hosts had collected just eight points from the previous seven games, while Shandong had managed 19 from the same period. Pressure was on both teams. Shanghai coach Javier Pereira knew that he was in danger of throwing away a 17-point lead over Shandong, while the visitors knew that only a win would do.

At a febrile Pudong Stadium, Lu Wenjun put Shanghai ahead early on, but by the break he was one of three players to have received his marching orders. Seven minutes before half-time, Lu picked up his first yellow for clattering into Shandong winger Chen Pu. While waiting for the resultant free-kick to be taken, the pair clashed again. In the tussle that followed they were both yellow-carded, and Lu walked.

The melee didn't end there, though. Shandong's Moises was shown a straight red for his involvement, but he wouldn't leave the pitch without insisting that the referee went to his pitchside monitor to see that the Brazilian midfielder's throat had been grabbed by Shanghai's Cai Huikang, who was then also dismissed. There was one more red to be shown – for coach Pereira, who was apoplectic on the sidelines – before the free-kick could finally be taken, more than seven minutes after it had been awarded.

The game needed the half-time break for tempers to cool, but they didn't much. Shandong substitute Fernandinho (or Fei Nanduo, as he's known in China) was also ejected for reacting angrily to a poor tackle from Li Shuai, shoving the defender to the floor to ensure that both teams had nine men with 15 minutes remaining.

Shandong did equalise through another sub, Xie Wenneng, in the 89th minute, but they could not find the all-important second. As the final whistle blew, Shanghai's celebrations began, marking their second title five years after the first.

Oscar, who has lamented in the past that playing in China had cost him his Brazilian spot, had a fine season. The former Chelsea midfielder played every single minute, scored nine goals and topped the assist charts with 13. Fellaini, whose successful spell has ended after five seasons, scored 11.

There should also be an honourable mention for Shanghai's Wu Lei. China's big European hope enjoyed his first full season back home after three-and-a-half years in Spain with Espanyol, and ended the season with 18 CSL goals.

It was a tally bettered only by prolific 26-year-old Brazilian forward Leonardo, whose 19 goals were split between loan spells at Changchun Yatai and Zhejiang. Having gone so close to the title, his parent club, Shandong, may well rue sending him out.

Leonardo's goals helped Zhejiang finish third for the second successive season above traditional powers such as Shanghai Shenhua and Beijing Guoan, while defending champions Wuhan Three Towns struggled to reach the heights of last season and ended in seventh.

At the bottom, Shenzhen started the season reasonably well with three wins and two draws from their first ten games, but then failed to win another and managed just one more point from the final 20 games of the season.

Dalian Pro would have escaped the other relegation spot with a final-day win against champions Shanghai, but threw away a two-goal lead to lose 3-2 in stoppage-time. The team from the northeast actually went down in 2021 but won a reprieve after other clubs folded. Only something similar will save them now.

Overall, it was an encouraging season. Attendances were healthy while clubs such as Beijing, Tianjin Jinmen Tigers and Qingdao Hainiu have been praised for focusing more on the commercial side of the game and have been increasing revenues from ticket sales and sponsorship. The long road to development may yet prove to be the more successful path for China.

The two contenders met in the penultimate game of the season with Shanghai, five points clear, knowing that a win would secure the title

Title decider...Shandong Taishan's Marouane Fellaini holds off Shanghai Port winger Lu Wenjun during their decisive showdown
Credit: Alamy

Top goalscorer...runners-up Shandong Taishan loaned out their Brazilian striker Leonardo

Falkland Islands

STEVE MENARY

Football on the Falklands

Re-establishment of the league gives football a boost on the South Atlantic islands

Island Games... Falklands players pose for a team photo ahead of their clash with Ynys Mon

The 2023 Island Games proved a tough tournament for the Falkland Islands, but the game continues to solider on in the small South Atlantic outpost despite a tiny playing pool and lack of any official recognition.

Eight sides contested this year's four-a-side indoor league in Stanley with Workboat Services winning the title. Four teams are expected to contest the 11-a-side outdoor season starting in mid-November 2023.

A new 4G AstroTurf pitch that opened in February 2023 in Stanley, where most of the Falklands' 3,000 population live, has helped stoke enthusiasm but games for the Islands' representative team remain scarce. Matches against teams from the British military presence on the islands had been a regular fixture but have proved hard to arrange in recent years.

"I am hopeful that the Falklands team will get more regular matches with the military lads this season. We have been making some arrangements already," says Troyd Bowles, chief pilot at the Falkland Islands Government Air Service and manager of the Island Games side.

In Guernsey, Bowles' side were drawn against three former gold medallists but acquitted themselves well, and briefly threatened a major upset against finalists Ynys Mon. In their first game against holders the Isle of Man, the Falklands went down 3-0 at Blanche Pierre Lane then a day later faced the Welsh Island at Corbet Field.

Before Ynys Mon could even settle, the Falklands took a shock early lead with Chilean Patricio Balladares shaping up to take the kick with his right foot before switching to his left and firing a superb shot into the top corner.

A win would have surpassed the Falklands' best Games result, a 1-0 win over the Estonian island of Saaremaa in 2007. Watching then and in Guernsey was veteran Falklands football organiser and pundit Patrick Watts, relaying commentary by mobile phone back to the South Atlantic to accompany a Facebook live stream.

Defending that lead for virtually an entire match was a mammoth task and not helped by the loss of Peruvian right-back Ever Monsefu Sanchez after the Isle of Man game.

> "We were bringing injured players on as subs simply because they were less injured than the boys coming off"
>
> Falkland Islands manager Troyd Bowles

Falklands' coaching staff... Troyd Bowles (L) and his team in Guernsey

To Watts' chagrin, the Falklanders struggled with Ynys Mon's direct approach and conceded four goals before half-time and lost 5-1.

His side finished the group stage with a 4-1 defeat to 2007 winners the Shetland Isles with Ethan Gilson-Clarke finding the net, but injuries were rapidly piling up before a placement match against the Swedish-speaking Finnish islands of Aland. Down 1-0 at half-time, the Falklands equalised through Declan Bonner but lost 4-2 on penalties.

"The reality was the lads had given their all and we were bringing injured players on as subs simply because they were less injured than the boys coming off," says Bowles, whose side must wait two years for their next outing.

Given that football at the next Games is likely to be oversubscribed again, there is no guarantee of the Falklands or their manager appearing. Bowles says: "The football club is planning to send a team to Orkney 2025. I am not sure if I will be the manager – it's a long way away and the last few years have been tough to balance between work, coaching and family time. I am going to keep managing the team for this season and will make a decision in April 2024."

The driving force behind the game's recent revival and the re-establishment of the league in Stanley, Bowles would be keenly missed if he were to depart.

NOVEMBER 25-DECEMBER 22

Global diary

Games and dates to pencil in for the month ahead

Asian Champions League

The AFC Champions League is working to a new schedule this season, and the group stage ends during the first two weeks of December. In the western side of the draw, Saudi Arabia's biggest-spending sides have, unsurprisingly, been dominant so far, while the eastern side of the draw has been far more open. *World Soccer*'s Asian football expert John Duerden will have a full round-up of the group-stage action in February's issue.

AFC Champions League...Cristiano Ronaldo celebrates scoring for Al Nassr

Women's UEFA Nations League

The Women's Nations League group stage concludes in early December. England have to beat the Netherlands and likely Scotland too, and hope that other results go their way, in order to progress from Group 1, while France, Denmark and Spain top the other League A groups ahead of their final games. Elsewhere, Wales could avoid relegation by beating Iceland, while the Republic of Ireland have already secured promotion from League B.

Crunch time...the Lionesses must win their last two games

Under-17 World Cup final

The youth tournament, which began in Indonesia in mid-November, reaches its conclusion on Saturday, December 2. The crunch end of this competition often offers a window to the future of the game: England's winning squad of 2017 featured the likes of Phil Foden, Jadon Sancho, Conor Gallagher, Morgan Gibbs-White, Emile Smith Rowe and Marc Guehi, while the 2015 tournament was won by a Victor Osimhen-inspired Nigeria.

CONCACAF Cups

The inaugural editions of CONCACAF's new club competitions, the Central American Cup and the Caribbean Cup, both conclude in early December. In the former, Costa Ricans Alajuelense play Real Esteli of Nicaragua, and in the latter Jamaican outfit Cavalier face Robinhood from Suriname. Both finals are two-legged, with the two winners advancing to the 2024 CONCACAF Champions Cup.

5 unmissable matches

- **Juventus v Internazionale, November 26**
  This edition of the *Derby d'Italia* could be the most significant since 2019-20, when the sides finished as Serie A's top two with just a point between them.

- **Manchester City v Tottenham Hotspur, December 3**
  Nothing will test Tottenham's Premier League title credentials quite like a trip to the home of the champions. A win for Ange Postecoglou's side here would be a serious statement.

- **Barcelona v Girona, December 9**
  Perhaps the most significant meeting these two Catalan rivals have ever had. High-flying Girona have never beaten Barca; this is as good a time as any to end that record.

- **Manchester United v Bayern Munich, December 12**
  This is one of the standout fixtures of the final round of Champions League group games – and not just because the two clubs have won the competition nine times between them. United urgently need a result at Old Trafford.

Rematch...Bayern beat United 4-3 in September with Harry Kane on target from the penalty spot

- **Club World Cup final, December 22**
  This year's tournament begins with hosts Al Ittihad taking on Auckland City, and ends with the final ten days later. Can anyone end Europe's decade-long domination of the competition?

End of summer seasons

As the end of 2023 approaches, a number of European leagues – including Norway, Sweden, Georgia and Republic of Ireland among others – reach their conclusions. Likewise, the South American domestic season is also drawing to a close, as are the Japanese and South Korean top flights. We'll be reviewing all of them in upcoming issues of *World Soccer*.

BUNDESLIGA 2023-24

AUGSBURG

GOALKEEPERS

1	Finn **DAHMEN**	(25) 27.03.98
33	Marcel **LUBIK**	(19) 19.05.04
40	Tomas **KOUBEK** (Cze)	(31) 26.08.92

DEFENDERS

2	Robert **GUMNY** (Pol)	(25) 04.06.98
3	Mads **PEDERSEN** (Den)	(27) 01.09.96
5	Patric **PFEIFFER** (Gha)	(24) 20.08.99
6	Jeffrey **GOUWELEEUW** (Ned)	(32) 10.07.91
19	Felix **UDUOKHAI**	(26) 09.09.97
22	**IAGO** (Bra)	(26) 23.03.97
23	Maximilian **BAUER**	(23) 09.02.00
26	Frederik **WINTHER** (Den)	(22) 04.01.01
32	Raphael **FRAMBERGER**	(28) 06.09.95
38	David **COLINA** (Cro)	(23) 19.07.00
39	Japhet **TANGANGA** (Eng)	(24) 31.03.99
42	Aaron **ZEHNTER**	(18) 31.10.04
43	Kevin **MBABU** (Sui)	(28) 19.04.95

MIDFIELDERS

4	Reece **OXFORD** (Eng)	(24) 16.12.98
8	Elvis **REXHBECAJ**	(26) 01.11.97
10	Arne **MAIER**	(24) 08.01.99
14	Masaya **OKUGAWA** (Jpn)	(27) 14.04.96
18	Tim **BREITHAUPT**	(21) 07.02.02
24	Fredrik **JENSEN** (Fin)	(26) 09.09.97
27	Arne **ENGELS** (Bel)	(20) 08.09.03
30	Niklas **DORSCH**	(25) 15.01.98
36	Mert **KOMUR**	(18) 17.07.05

FORWARDS

7	Dion Drena **BELJO** (Cro)	(21) 01.03.02
9	Ermedin **DEMIROVIC** (Bih)	(25) 25.03.98
16	Ruben **VARGAS** (Sui)	(25) 05.08.98
20	Sven **MICHEL**	(33) 15.07.90
21	Phillip **TIETZ**	(26) 09.07.97
34	Nathanael **MBUKU** (Fra)	(21) 16.03.02
48	Irvin **CARDONA** (Fra)	(26) 08.08.97

COACH

Jess **THORUP** (Den)	(53) 21.02.70

B. LEVERKUSEN

GOALKEEPERS

1	Lukas **HRADECKY** (Fin)	(34) 24.11.89
17	Matej **KOVAR** (Cze)	(23) 17.05.00
36	Niklas **LOMB**	(30) 28.07.93

DEFENDERS

2	Josip **STANISIC** (Cro)	(23) 02.04.00
3	Piero **HINCAPIE** (Ecu)	(21) 09.01.02
4	Jonathan **TAH**	(27) 11.02.96
6	Odilon **KOSSOUNOU** (Civ)	(22) 04.01.01
12	Edmond **TAPSOBA** (Bfa)	(24) 02.02.99
13	**ARTHUR** (Bra)	(20) 17.03.03
20	Alex **GRIMALDO** (Spa)	(28) 20.09.95
24	Timothy **FOSU-MENSAH** (Ned)	(25) 02.01.98
30	Jeremie **FRIMPONG** (Ned)	(22) 10.12.00
48	Reno **MUNZ**	(18) 02.10.05

MIDFIELDERS

8	Robert **ANDRICH**	(29) 22.09.94
10	Florian **WIRTZ**	(20) 03.05.03
11	Nadiem **AMIRI**	(27) 27.10.96
18	Noah **MBAMBA** (Bel)	(18) 05.01.05
25	Exequiel **PALACIOS** (Arg)	(25) 05.10.98
32	Gustavo **PUERTA** (Col)	(20) 23.07.03
34	Granit **XHAKA** (Sui)	(31) 27.09.92
47	Ayman **AOURIR**	(19) 06.10.04

FORWARDS

7	Jonas **HOFMANN**	(31) 14.07.92
14	Patrik **SCHICK** (Cze)	(27) 24.01.96
19	Nathan **TELLA** (Eng)	(24) 05.07.99
21	Amine **ADLI** (Mar)	(23) 10.05.00
22	Victor **BONIFACE** (Nga)	(22) 23.12.00
23	Adam **HLOZEK** (Cze)	(21) 25.07.02

COACH

Xabi **ALONSO** (Spa)	(41) 25.11.81

BAYERN MUNICH

GOALKEEPERS

1	Manuel **NEUER**	(37) 27.03.86
18	Daniel **PERETZ** (Isr)	(23) 10.07.00
26	Sven **ULREICH**	(35) 03.08.88
43	Tom **HULSMANN**	(19) 11.04.04
48	Max **SCHMITT**	(17) 18.01.06

DEFENDERS

2	Dayot **UPAMECANO** (Fra)	(25) 27.10.98
3	**KIM** Min-jae (Kor)	(27) 15.11.96
4	Matthijs **DE LIGT** (Ned)	(24) 12.08.99
19	Alphonso **DAVIES** (Can)	(23) 02.11.00
20	Bouna **SARR** (Sen)	(31) 31.01.92
22	Raphael **GUERREIRO** (Por)	(29) 22.12.93
28	Tarek **BUCHMANN**	(18) 28.02.05
37	Luca **DENK**	(20) 02.03.03
40	Noussair **MAZRAOUI** (Mar)	(26) 14.11.97

MIDFIELDERS

6	Joshua **KIMMICH**	(28) 08.02.95
8	Leon **GORETZKA**	(28) 06.02.95
27	Konrad **LAIMER** (Aut)	(26) 27.05.97
41	Frans **KRATZIG**	(20) 14.01.03
42	Jamal **MUSIALA**	(20) 26.02.03
45	Aleksandar **PAVLOVIC**	(19) 03.05.04
46	Taichi **FUKUI** (Jpn)	(19) 15.07.04

FORWARDS

7	Serge **GNABRY**	(28) 14.07.95
9	Harry **KANE** (Eng)	(30) 28.07.93
10	Leroy **SANE**	(27) 11.01.96
11	Kingsley **COMAN** (Fra)	(27) 13.06.96
13	Eric Maxim **CHOUPO-MOTING** (Cmr)	(34) 23.03.89
25	Thomas **MULLER**	(34) 13.09.89
39	Mathys **TEL** (Fra)	(18) 27.04.05

COACH

Thomas **TUCHEL**	(50) 29.08.73

Star signing...Harry Kane has hit the ground running at Bayern

BOCHUM

GOALKEEPERS

1	Manuel **RIEMANN**	(35) 09.09.88
21	Michael **ESSER**	(36) 22.11.87
23	Niclas **THIEDE**	(24) 14.04.99

DEFENDERS

2	Cristian **GAMBOA** (Crc)	(34) 24.10.89
3	Danilo **SOARES** (Bra)	(32) 29.10.91
4	Erhan **MASOVIC** (Srb)	(25) 22.11.98
5	**BERNARDO** (Bra)	(28) 14.05.95
14	Tim **OERMANN**	(20) 06.10.03
15	Felix **PASSLACK**	(25) 29.05.98
18	Jordi **OSEI-TUTU** (Eng)	(25) 02.10.98
20	Ivan **ORDETS** (Ukr)	(31) 08.07.92
25	Mohammed **TOLBA**	(19) 19.07.04
30	Moritz **ROMLING**	(22) 30.04.01
31	Keven **SCHLOTTERBECK**	(26) 28.04.97
32	Maximilian **WITTEK**	(28) 21.08.95
41	Noah **LOOSLI** (Sui)	(26) 23.01.97

MIDFIELDERS

6	Patrick **OSTERHAGE**	(23) 01.02.00
7	Kevin **STOGER** (Aut)	(30) 27.08.93
8	Anthony **LOSILLA** (Fra)	(37) 10.03.86
10	Philipp **FORSTER**	(28) 04.02.95
13	Lukas **DASCHNER**	(25) 01.10.98
19	Matus **BERO** (Svk)	(28) 06.09.95
24	Mats **PANNEWIG**	(19) 28.10.04
27	Moritz **KWARTENG** (Gha)	(25) 28.04.98

FORWARDS

9	Goncalo **PACIENCIA** (Por)	(29) 01.08.94
11	Takuma **ASANO** (Jpn)	(29) 10.11.94
22	Christopher **ANTWI-ADJEI** (Gha)	(29) 07.02.94
29	Moritz **BROSCHINSKI**	(23) 23.09.00
33	Philipp **HOFMANN**	(30) 30.03.93
39	Lys **MOUSSET** (Fra)	(27) 08.02.96

COACH

Thomas **LETSCH**	(55) 26.08.68

B. DORTMUND

GOALKEEPERS

1	Gregor **KOBEL** (Sui)	(25) 06.12.97
31	Silas **OSTRZINSKI**	(20) 19.11.03
33	Alexander **MEYER**	(32) 13.04.91
35	Marcel **LOTKA** (Pol)	(22) 25.05.01

DEFENDERS

2	Mateu **MOREY** (Spa)	(23) 02.03.00
4	Nico **SCHLOTTERBECK**	(23) 01.12.99
5	Ramy **BENSEBAINI** (Alg)	(28) 16.04.95
15	Mats **HUMMELS**	(34) 16.12.88
17	Marius **WOLF**	(28) 27.05.95
24	Thomas **MEUNIER** (Bel)	(32) 12.09.91
25	Niklas **SULE**	(28) 03.09.95
26	Julian **RYERSON** (Nor)	(26) 17.11.97
42	Hendry **BLANK**	(19) 21.08.04
45	Guille **BUENO** (Spa)	(21) 18.09.02

MIDFIELDERS

6	Salih **OZCAN** (Tur)	(25) 11.01.98
7	Gio **REYNA** (USA)	(21) 13.11.02
8	Felix **NMECHA**	(23) 10.10.00
11	Marco **REUS**	(34) 31.05.89
19	Julian **BRANDT**	(27) 02.05.96
20	Marcel **SABITZER** (Aut)	(29) 17.03.94
23	Emre **CAN**	(29) 12.01.94
30	Ole **POHLMANN**	(22) 05.04.01
32	Abdoulaye **KAMARA** (Gui)	(19) 06.11.04
47	Antonios **PAPADOPOULOS**	(24) 10.09.99

FORWARDS

9	Sebastien **HALLER** (Civ)	(29) 22.06.94
14	Niclas **FULLKRUG**	(30) 09.02.93
16	Julien **DURANVILLE** (Bel)	(17) 05.05.06
18	Youssoufa **MOUKOKO**	(19) 20.11.04
21	Donyell **MALEN** (Ned)	(24) 19.01.99
27	Karim **ADEYEMI**	(21) 18.01.02
43	Jamie **BYNOE-GITTENS** (Eng)	(19) 08.08.04
48	Samuel **BAMBA**	(19) 13.02.04

COACH

Edin **TERZIC**	(41) 30.10.82

B. M'GLADBACH

GOALKEEPERS

1	Jonas **OMLIN** (Sui)	(29) 10.01.94
21	Tobias **SIPPEL**	(35) 22.03.88
33	Moritz **NICOLAS**	(26) 21.10.97
41	Jan **OLSCHOWSKY**	(22) 18.11.01
43	Max **BRULL**	(21) 26.08.02

DEFENDERS

2	Fabio **CHIARODIA** (Ita)	(18) 05.06.05
3	Ko **ITAKURA** (Jpn)	(26) 27.01.97
5	Marvin **FRIEDRICH**	(27) 13.12.95
18	Stefan **LAINER** (Aut)	(31) 27.08.92
20	Luca **NETZ**	(20) 15.05.03
24	Tony **JANTSCHKE**	(33) 07.04.90
26	Lukas **ULLRICH**	(19) 16.03.04
29	Joe **SCALLY** (USA)	(20) 31.12.02
30	Nico **ELVEDI** (Sui)	(27) 30.09.96
39	Max **WOBER** (Aut)	(25) 04.02.98
45	Simon **WALDE**	(18) 04.01.05

MIDFIELDERS

8	Julian **WEIGL**	(28) 08.09.95
9	Franck **HONORAT** (Fra)	(27) 11.08.96
10	Florian **NEUHAUS**	(26) 16.03.97
11	Hannes **WOLF** (Aut)	(24) 16.04.99
17	Manu **KONE** (Fra)	(22) 17.05.01
19	Nathan **NGOUMOU** (Fra)	(23) 14.03.00
23	Christoph **KRAMER**	(32) 19.02.91
27	Rocco **REITZ**	(21) 29.05.02

FORWARDS

7	Patrick **HERRMANN**	(32) 12.02.91
13	Jordan **SIEBATCHEU** (USA)	(27) 26.04.96
14	Alassane **PLEA** (Fra)	(30) 10.03.93
25	Robin **HACK**	(25) 27.08.98
28	Grant-Leon **RANOS** (Arm)	(20) 20.07.03
31	Tomas **CVANCARA** (Cze)	(23) 13.08.00
38	Yvandro **BORGES SANCHES** (Lux)	(19) 24.05.04

COACH

Gerardo **SEOANE** (Sui)	(45) 30.10.78

COLOGNE

GOALKEEPERS

1	Marvin **SCHWABE**	(28) 25.04.95
12	Jonas **NICKISCH**	(19) 21.05.04
20	Philipp **PENTKE**	(38) 01.05.85
44	Matthias **KOBBING**	(26) 28.05.97

DEFENDERS

2	Benno **SCHMITZ**	(29) 17.11.94
3	Dominique **HEINTZ**	(30) 15.08.93
4	Timo **HUBERS**	(27) 20.07.96
15	Luca **KILIAN**	(24) 01.09.99
17	Leart **PAQARADA** (Kos)	(29) 08.10.94
18	Rasmus **CARSTENSEN** (Den)	(23) 10.11.00
24	Julian **CHABOT**	(25) 12.02.98
30	Noah **KATTERBACH**	(22) 13.04.01
35	Max **FINKGRAFE**	(19) 27.03.04
38	Elias **BAKATUKANDA**	(19) 13.04.04
46	Rijad **SMAJIC** (Bih)	(19) 02.05.04

MIDFIELDERS

6	Eric **MARTEL**	(21) 29.04.02
7	Dejan **LJUBICIC** (Aut)	(26) 08.10.97
8	Denis **HUSEINBASIC**	(22) 03.07.01
11	Florian **KAINZ** (Aut)	(31) 24.10.92
22	Jacob **CHRISTENSEN** (Den)	(22) 25.06.01
37	Linton **MAINA**	(24) 23.06.99
47	Mathias **OLESEN** (Lux)	(22) 21.03.01

FORWARDS

9	Luca **WALDSCHMIDT**	(27) 19.05.96
13	Mark **UTH**	(32) 24.08.91
19	Dimitris **LIMNIOS** (Gre)	(25) 27.05.98
21	Steffen **TIGGES**	(25) 31.07.98
23	Sargis **ADAMYAN** (Arm)	(30) 23.05.93
27	Davie **SELKE**	(28) 20.01.95
29	Jan **THIELMANN**	(21) 26.05.02
33	Florian **DIETZ**	(25) 03.08.98
40	Faride **ALIDOU**	(22) 18.07.01
42	Damion **DOWNS**	(19) 06.07.04

COACH

Steffen **BAUMGART**	(51) 05.01.72

DARMSTADT

GOALKEEPERS

1	Marcel **SCHUHEN**	(30) 13.01.93
13	Morten **BEHRENS**	(26) 01.04.97
30	Alexander **BRUNST**	(28) 07.07.95

DEFENDERS

3	Thomas **ISHERWOOD** (Swe)	(25) 28.01.98
4	Christoph **ZIMMERMANN**	(30) 12.01.93
5	Matej **MAGLICA** (Cro)	(25) 25.09.98
14	Christoph **KLARER** (Aut)	(23) 14.06.00
17	Frank **RONSTADT**	(26) 21.07.97
19	Emir **KARIC** (Aut)	(26) 09.06.97
20	Jannik **MULLER**	(29) 18.01.94
26	Matthias **BADER**	(26) 17.06.97
32	Fabian **HOLLAND**	(33) 11.07.90
38	Clemens **RIEDEL**	(20) 19.07.03

MIDFIELDERS

6	Marvin **MEHLEM**	(26) 11.09.97
8	Fabian **SCHNELLHARDT**	(29) 12.01.94
11	Tobias **KEMPE**	(34) 27.06.89
15	Fabian **NURNBERGER** (Bul)	(24) 28.07.99
16	Andreas **MULLER**	(23) 20.07.00
18	Mathias **HONSAK** (Aut)	(26) 20.12.96
23	Klaus **GJASULA** (Alb)	(33) 14.12.89
28	Bartol **FRANJIC** (Cro)	(23) 14.01.00

FORWARDS

7	Braydon **MANU** (Gha)	(26) 28.03.97
9	Fraser **HORNBY** (Sco)	(24) 13.09.99
10	Filip **STOJILKOVIC** (Sui)	(23) 04.01.00
22	Aaron **SEYDEL**	(27) 07.02.96
24	Luca **PFEIFFER**	(27) 20.08.96
27	Tim **SKARKE**	(27) 07.09.96
29	Oscar **VILHELMSSON** (Swe)	(20) 02.10.03
42	Fabio **TORSIELLO**	(18) 02.02.05

COACH

Torsten **LIEBERKNECHT**	(50) 01.08.73

E. FRANKFURT

GOALKEEPERS

1	Kevin **TRAPP**	(33) 08.07.90
33	Jens **GRAHL**	(35) 22.09.88
40	**KAUA** (Bra)	(20) 11.04.03
41	Simon **SIMONI** (Alb)	(19) 14.07.04
42	Luke **GAUER**	(18) 28.05.05

DEFENDERS

3	Willian **PACHO** (Ecu)	(22) 16.10.01
4	Robin **KOCH**	(27) 17.07.96
5	Hrvoje **SMOLCIC** (Cro)	(23) 17.08.00
20	Makoto **HASEBE** (Jpn)	(39) 18.01.84
22	Timothy **CHANDLER** (USA)	(33) 29.03.90
24	Aurelio **BUTA** (Por)	(26) 10.02.97
29	Niels **NKOUNKOU** (Fra)	(23) 01.11.00
31	Philipp **MAX**	(30) 30.09.93
34	Nnamdi **COLLINS**	(19) 10.01.04
35	**TUTA** (Bra)	(24) 04.07.99
46	Dario **GEBUHR**	(20) 06.05.03
47	Elias **BAUM**	(18) 26.10.05

MIDFIELDERS

6	Kristijan **JAKIC** (Cro)	(26) 14.05.97
8	Fares **CHAIBI** (Alg)	(20) 28.11.02
15	Ellyes **SKHIRI** (Tun)	(28) 10.05.95
16	Hugo **LARSSON** (Swe)	(19) 27.06.04
17	Sebastian **RODE**	(33) 11.10.90
26	Eric **DINA-EBIMBE** (Fra)	(23) 21.11.00
27	Mario **GOTZE**	(31) 03.06.92
28	Marcel **WENIG**	(19) 04.05.04
30	Paxten **AARONSON** (USA)	(20) 26.08.03
37	Sidney **RAEBIGER**	(18) 17.04.05
44	Davis **BAUTISTA** (Ecu)	(18) 16.02.05
45	Mehdi **LOUNE**	(19) 14.05.04
49	Harpreet **GHOTRA**	(20) 17.01.03

FORWARDS

7	Omar **MARMOUSH** (Egy)	(24) 07.02.99
18	Jessic **NGANKAM**	(23) 20.07.00
21	Lucas **ALARIO** (Arg)	(31) 08.10.92
23	Jens Petter **HAUGE** (Nor)	(24) 12.10.99
36	Ansgar **KNAUFF**	(21) 10.01.02
43	Noel **FUTKEU**	(20) 06.12.02
48	Nacho **FERRI** (Spa)	(19) 05.10.04

COACH

Dino **TOPPMOLLER**	(43) 23.11.80

FREIBURG

GOALKEEPERS

1	Noah **ATUBOLU**	(21) 25.05.02
21	Florian **MULLER**	(26) 13.11.97
31	Benjamin **UPHOFF**	(30) 08.08.93
58	Niklas **SAUTER**	(20) 06.04.03

DEFENDERS

3	Philipp **LIENHART** (Aut)	(27) 11.07.96
4	Kenneth **SCHMIDT**	(21) 03.06.02
5	Manuel **GULDE**	(32) 12.02.91
17	Lukas **KUBLER**	(31) 30.08.92
25	Kiliann **SILDILLIA** (Fra)	(21) 16.05.02
28	Matthias **GINTER**	(29) 19.01.94
30	Christian **GUNTER**	(30) 28.02.93
33	Jordy **MAKENGO** (Fra)	(22) 03.08.01
37	Max **ROSENFELDER**	(20) 10.02.03

MIDFIELDERS

7	Noah **WEISSHAUPT**	(22) 20.09.01
8	Maximilian **EGGESTEIN**	(26) 08.12.96
11	Daniel-Kofi **KYEREH** (Gha)	(27) 08.03.96
14	Yannik **KEITEL**	(23) 15.02.00
27	Nicolas **HOFLER**	(33) 09.03.90
34	Merlin **ROHL**	(21) 05.07.02
35	Fabian **RUDLIN**	(26) 13.01.97

FORWARDS

9	Lucas **HOLER**	(29) 10.07.94
20	Junior **ADAMU** (Aut)	(22) 06.06.01
22	Roland **SALLAI** (Hun)	(26) 22.05.97
26	Maximilian **PHILIPP**	(29) 01.03.94
32	Vincenzo **GRIFO** (Ita)	(30) 07.04.93
38	Michael **GREGORITSCH** (Aut)	(29) 18.04.94
42	Ritsu **DOAN** (Jpn)	(25) 16.06.98
44	Maximilian **BREUNIG**	(23) 14.08.00
54	Mika **BAUR**	(19) 09.07.04

COACH

	Christian **STREICH**	(58) 11.06.65

HEIDENHEIM

GOALKEEPERS

1	Kevin **MULLER**	(32) 15.03.91
22	Vitus **EICHER**	(33) 05.11.90
34	Paul **TSCHERNUTH** (Aut)	(21) 20.01.02
40	Frank **FELLER**	(19) 07.01.04

DEFENDERS

2	Marnon **BUSCH**	(28) 08.12.94
4	Tim **SIERSLEBEN**	(23) 09.03.00
6	Patrick **MAINKA**	(29) 06.11.94
19	Jonas **FOHRENBACH**	(27) 26.01.96
23	Omar **TRAORE**	(25) 04.02.98
27	Thomas **KELLER**	(24) 05.08.99
29	Seedy **JARJU** (Gam)	(19) 28.10.04
30	Norman **THEUERKAUF**	(36) 24.01.87
33	Lennard **MALONEY** (USA)	(24) 08.10.99

MIDFIELDERS

3	Jan **SCHOPPNER**	(24) 12.06.99
5	Benedikt **GIMBER**	(26) 19.02.97
11	Denis **THOMALLA**	(31) 16.08.92
16	Kevin **SESSA**	(23) 06.07.00
21	Adrian **BECK**	(26) 09.06.97
36	Luka **JANES**	(19) 19.01.04
37	Jan-Niklas **BESTE**	(24) 04.01.99

FORWARDS

8	Eren **DINKCI**	(21) 13.12.01
9	Stefan **SCHIMMER**	(29) 28.04.94
10	Tim **KLEINDIENST**	(28) 31.08.95
17	Florian **PICK**	(28) 08.09.95
18	Marvin **PIERINGER**	(24) 04.10.99
20	Nikola **DOVEDAN** (Aut)	(29) 06.07.94
24	Christian **KUHLWETTER**	(27) 21.04.96
25	Christopher **NEGELE**	(18) 11.04.05
44	Elidon **QENAJ** (Kos)	(20) 22.05.03

COACH

	Frank **SCHMIDT**	(49) 03.01.74

HOFFENHEIM

GOALKEEPERS

1	Oliver **BAUMANN**	(33) 02.06.90
36	Nahuel **NOLL**	(20) 17.03.03
37	Luca **PHILIPP**	(22) 28.11.00

DEFENDERS

3	Pavel **KADERABEK** (Cze)	(31) 25.04.92
5	Ozan **KABAK** (Tur)	(23) 25.03.00
15	Kasim **ADAMS** (Gha)	(28) 22.06.95
22	Kevin **VOGT**	(32) 23.09.91
23	John Anthony **BROOKS** (USA)	(30) 28.01.93
25	Kevin **AKPOGUMA** (Nga)	(28) 19.04.95
34	Stanley **NSOKI** (Fra)	(24) 09.04.99
41	Attila **SZALAI** (Hun)	(25) 20.01.98
48	Joshua **QUARSHIE**	(19) 26.07.04

MIDFIELDERS

6	Grischa **PROMEL**	(28) 09.01.95
8	Dennis **GEIGER**	(25) 10.06.98
11	Florian **GRILLITSCH** (Aut)	(28) 07.08.95
16	Anton **STACH**	(25) 15.11.98
17	Julian **JUSTVAN**	(25) 02.04.98
18	Diadie **SAMASSEKOU** (Mli)	(27) 11.01.96
20	Finn Ole **BECKER**	(23) 08.06.00
24	Marco **JOHN**	(21) 02.04.02
31	Bambase **CONTE**	(20) 07.07.03
39	Tom **BISCHOF**	(18) 28.06.05
40	Umut **TOHUMCU**	(19) 11.08.04

FORWARDS

7	Mergim **BERISHA**	(25) 11.05.98
9	Ihlas **BEBOU** (Tog)	(29) 23.04.94
10	Wout **WEGHORST** (Ned)	(31) 07.08.92
14	Maximilian **BEIER**	(21) 17.10.02
21	Marius **BULTER**	(30) 29.03.93
27	Andrej **KRAMARIC** (Cro)	(32) 19.06.91
29	Robert **SKOV** (Den)	(27) 20.05.96

COACH

	Pellegrino **MATARAZZO** (USA)	(45) 28.11.77

MAINZ

GOALKEEPERS

1	Lasse **RIESS**	(22) 27.07.01
27	Robin **ZENTNER**	(29) 28.10.94
33	Daniel **BATZ**	(32) 12.01.91

DEFENDERS

2	Phillipp **MWENE** (Aut)	(29) 29.01.94
3	Sepp **VAN DEN BERG** (Ned)	(21) 20.12.01
5	Maxim **LEITSCH**	(25) 18.05.98
16	Stefan **BELL**	(32) 24.08.91
19	Anthony **CACI** (Fra)	(26) 01.07.97
21	Danny **DA COSTA**	(30) 13.07.93
25	Andreas **HANCHE-OLSEN** (Nor)	(26) 17.01.97
30	Silvan **WIDMER** (Sui)	(30) 05.03.93

MIDFIELDERS

4	Aymane **BARKOK** (Mar)	(25) 21.05.98
7	**LEE** Jae-sung (Kor)	(31) 10.08.92
8	Leandro **BARREIRO** (Lux)	(23) 03.01.00
14	Tom **KRAUSS**	(22) 22.06.01
20	Edimilson **FERNANDES** (Sui)	(27) 15.04.96
23	Josuha **GUILAVOGUI** (Fra)	(33) 19.09.90
24	Merveille **PAPELA**	(22) 18.01.01
31	Dominik **KOHR**	(29) 31.01.94
41	Eniss **SHABANI** (Alb)	(20) 29.05.03

FORWARDS

9	Karim **ONISIWO** (Aut)	(31) 17.03.92
10	Marco **RICHTER**	(26) 24.11.97
17	Ludovic **AJORQUE** (Fra)	(29) 25.02.94
29	Jonathan **BURKARDT**	(23) 11.07.00
43	Brajan **GRUDA**	(19) 31.05.04
44	Nelson **WEIPER**	(18) 17.03.05
45	David **MAMUTOVIC**	(22) 05.12.00

COACH

	Jan **SIEWERT** – *interim*	(41) 23.08.82

RB LEIPZIG

GOALKEEPERS

1	Peter **GULACSI** (Hun)	(33) 06.05.90
21	Janis **BLASWICH**	(32) 02.05.91
25	Leopold **ZINGERLE**	(29) 10.04.94
36	Timo **SCHLIECK**	(17) 02.03.06

DEFENDERS

2	Mohamed **SIMAKAN** (Fra)	(23) 03.05.00
3	Christopher **LENZ**	(29) 22.09.94
4	Willi **ORBAN** (Hun)	(31) 03.11.92
5	El Chadaille **BITSHIABU** (Fra)	(18) 16.05.05
16	Lukas **KLOSTERMANN**	(27) 03.06.96
22	David **RAUM**	(25) 22.04.98
23	Castello **LUKEBA** (Fra)	(20) 17.12.02
31	Tim **KOHLER**	(18) 02.05.05
39	Benjamin **HENRICHS**	(26) 23.02.97

MIDFIELDERS

7	Dani **OLMO** (Spa)	(25) 07.05.98
8	Amadou **HAIDARA** (Mli)	(25) 31.01.98
10	Emil **FORSBERG** (Swe)	(32) 23.10.91
13	Nicolas **SEIWALD** (Aut)	(22) 04.05.01
14	Christoph **BAUMGARTNER** (Aut)	(24) 01.08.99
18	Fabio **CARVALHO** (Por)	(21) 30.08.02
20	Xavi **SIMONS** (Ned)	(20) 21.04.03
24	Xaver **SCHLAGER** (Aut)	(26) 28.09.97
26	Ilaix **MORIBA** (Gui)	(20) 19.01.03
44	Kevin **KAMPL** (Svn)	(33) 09.10.90

FORWARDS

9	Yussuf **POULSEN** (Den)	(29) 15.06.94
11	Timo **WERNER**	(27) 06.03.96
17	Lois **OPENDA** (Bel)	(23) 16.02.00
30	Benjamin **SESKO** (Svn)	(20) 31.05.03

COACH

	Marco **ROSE**	(47) 11.09.76

STUTTGART

GOALKEEPERS

1	Fabian **BREDLOW**	(28) 02.03.95
33	Alexander **NUBEL**	(27) 30.09.96
41	Dennis **SEIMEN**	(17) 01.12.05
42	Florian **SCHOCK**	(22) 22.05.01

DEFENDERS

2	Waldemar **ANTON**	(27) 20.07.96
4	Josha **VAGNOMAN**	(22) 11.12.00
7	Maximilian **MITTELSTADT**	(26) 18.03.97
15	Pascal **STENZEL**	(27) 20.03.96
20	Leonidas **STERGIOU** (Sui)	(21) 03.03.02
21	Hiroki **ITO** (Jpn)	(24) 12.05.99
23	Dan-Axel **ZAGADOU** (Fra)	(24) 03.06.99
29	Anthony **ROUAULT** (Fra)	(22) 29.05.01

MIDFIELDERS

6	Angelo **STILLER**	(22) 04.04.01
8	Enzo **MILLOT** (Fra)	(21) 17.07.02
16	Atakan **KARAZOR**	(27) 13.10.96
17	Genki **HARAGUCHI** (Jpn)	(32) 09.05.91
25	Lilian **EGLOFF**	(21) 20.08.02
27	Chris **FUHRICH**	(25) 09.01.98
28	Nikolas **NARTEY** (Den)	(23) 22.02.00
32	Roberto **MASSIMO**	(23) 12.10.00
36	Laurin **ULRICH**	(18) 31.01.05
40	Luca **RAIMUND**	(18) 09.04.05

FORWARDS

9	Serhou **GUIRASSY** (Gui)	(27) 12.03.96
10	**JEONG** Woo-yeong (Kor)	(24) 20.09.99
14	Silas **KATOMPA MVUMPA** (Cod)	(25) 06.10.98
18	Jamie **LEWELING**	(22) 26.02.01
19	Jovan **MILOSEVIC** (Srb)	(18) 31.07.05
22	Thomas **KASTANARAS**	(20) 09.01.03
26	Deniz **UNDAV**	(27) 19.07.96

COACH

	Sebastian **HOENESS**	(41) 12.05.82

Goal machine...Stuttgart's Guinean international striker Serhou Guirassy topped the Bundesliga scoring charts early on in 2023-24

UNION BERLIN

GOALKEEPERS

1	Frederik **RONNOW** (Den)	(31) 04.08.92
12	Jakob **BUSK** (Den)	(30) 12.09.93
37	Alexander **SCHWOLOW**	(31) 02.06.92
39	Yannic **STEIN**	(19) 17.09.04

DEFENDERS

3	Paul **JAECKEL**	(25) 22.07.98
4	Diogo **LEITE** (Por)	(24) 23.01.99
5	Danilho **DOEKHI** (Ned)	(25) 30.06.98
6	Robin **GOSENS**	(29) 05.07.94
18	Josip **JURANOVIC** (Cro)	(28) 16.08.95
23	Leonardo **BONUCCI** (Ita)	(36) 01.05.87
26	Jerome **ROUSSILLON** (Glp)	(30) 06.01.93
28	Christopher **TRIMMEL** (Aut)	(36) 24.02.87
31	Robin **KNOCHE**	(31) 22.05.92

MIDFIELDERS

7	Brenden **AARONSON** (USA)	(23) 22.10.00
8	Rani **KHEDIRA**	(29) 27.01.94
13	Andras **SCHAFER** (Hun)	(24) 13.04.99
19	Janik **HABERER**	(29) 02.04.94
20	Aissa **LAIDOUNI** (Tun)	(26) 13.12.96
29	Lucas **TOUSART** (Fra)	(26) 29.04.97
33	Alex **KRAL** (Cze)	(25) 19.05.98
36	Aljoscha **KEMLEIN**	(19) 02.08.04

FORWARDS

9	Mikkel **KAUFMANN** (Den)	(22) 03.01.01
10	Kevin **VOLLAND**	(31) 30.07.92
11	David Datro **FOFANA** (Civ)	(20) 22.12.02
16	Benedict **HOLLERBACH**	(22) 17.05.01
17	Kevin **BEHRENS**	(32) 03.02.91
27	Sheraldo **BECKER** (Sur)	(28) 09.02.95
38	Laurenz **DEHL**	(21) 12.12.01

COACH

	Urs **FISCHER** (Sui)	(57) 20.02.66

WERDER BREMEN

GOALKEEPERS

1	Jiri **PAVLENKA** (Cze)	(31) 14.04.92
30	Michael **ZETTERER**	(28) 12.07.95
37	Spyros **ANGELIDIS** (Gre)	(18) 28.01.05
38	**DUDU**	(24) 10.02.99

DEFENDERS

3	Anthony **JUNG**	(32) 03.11.91
4	Niklas **STARK**	(28) 14.04.95
5	Amos **PIEPER**	(25) 17.01.98
8	Mitchell **WEISER**	(29) 21.04.94
13	Milos **VELJKOVIC** (Srb)	(28) 26.09.95
27	Felix **AGU**	(24) 27.09.99
32	Marco **FRIEDL** (Aut)	(25) 16.03.98
40	Cimo **ROCKER**	(29) 21.01.94

MIDFIELDERS

2	Olivier **DEMAN** (Bel)	(23) 06.04.00
6	Jens **STAGE** (Den)	(27) 08.11.96
10	Leonardo **BITTENCOURT**	(29) 19.12.93
14	Senne **LYNEN** (Bel)	(24) 19.02.99
18	Naby **KEITA** (Gui)	(28) 10.02.95
20	Romano **SCHMID** (Aut)	(23) 27.01.00
23	Nicolai **RAPP**	(26) 13.12.96
36	Christian **GROSS**	(34) 08.02.89

FORWARDS

7	Marvin **DUCKSCH**	(29) 07.03.94
9	Dawid **KOWNACKI** (Pol)	(26) 14.03.97
17	Justin **NJINMAH**	(23) 15.11.00
19	Rafael **BORRE** (Col)	(28) 15.09.95
29	Nick **WOLTEMADE**	(21) 14.02.02
35	Leon **OPITZ**	(18) 11.04.05

COACH

	Ole **WERNER**	(35) 04.05.88

WOLFSBURG

GOALKEEPERS

1	Koen **CASTEELS** (Bel)	(31) 25.06.92
12	Pavao **PERVAN** (Aut)	(36) 13.11.87
30	Niklas **KLINGER**	(28) 13.10.95
35	Philipp **SCHULZE**	(20) 29.01.03

DEFENDERS

2	Kilian **FISCHER**	(23) 12.10.00
3	Sebastiaan **BORNAUW** (Bel)	(24) 22.03.99
4	Maxence **LACROIX** (Fra)	(23) 06.04.00
5	Cedric **ZESIGER** (Sui)	(25) 24.06.98
8	Nicolas **COZZA** (Fra)	(24) 08.01.99
13	**ROGERIO** (Bra)	(25) 13.01.98
20	Ridle **BAKU**	(25) 08.04.98
21	Joakim **MAEHLE** (Den)	(26) 20.05.97
25	Moritz **JENZ**	(24) 30.04.99
37	Felix **LANGE**	(19) 13.03.04

MIDFIELDERS

6	Aster **VRANCKX** (Bel)	(21) 04.10.02
19	Lovro **MAJER** (Cro)	(25) 17.01.98
27	Maximilian **ARNOLD**	(29) 27.05.94
31	Yannick **GERHARDT**	(29) 13.03.94
32	Mattias **SVANBERG** (Swe)	(24) 05.01.99
40	Kevin **PAREDES** (USA)	(20) 07.05.03

FORWARDS

7	Vaclav **CERNY** (Cze)	(26) 17.10.97
9	Amin **SARR** (Swe)	(22) 11.03.01
10	Lukas **NMECHA**	(24) 14.12.98
11	Tiago **TOMAS** (Por)	(21) 16.06.02
16	Jakub **KAMINSKI** (Pol)	(21) 05.06.02
18	Dzenan **PEJCINOVIC**	(18) 15.02.05
23	Jonas **WIND** (Den)	(24) 07.02.99
39	Patrick **WIMMER** (Aut)	(22) 30.05.01

COACH

	Niko **KOVAC** (Cro)	(52) 15.10.71

(Ages as of 24.11.23)

ESM XI

EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

SEASON RANKINGS
Cumulative votes through the season

GOALKEEPERS

Lukas Hradecky (Bayer Leverkusen)	5
Yann Sommer (Internazionale)	4
Alisson (Liverpool)	2
Marcin Bulka (Nice)	2
Wojciech Szczesny (Juventus)	2
Kepa Arrizabalaga (Real Madrid)	1
Ederson (Manchester City)	1
Andre Onana (Manchester United)	1
Ivan Provedel (Lazio)	1
Marc-Andre ter Stegen (Barcelona)	1

DEFENDERS

Alex Grimaldo (Bayer Leverkusen)	7
Jonathan Tah (Bayer Leverkusen)	6
Dani Carvajal (Real Madrid)	4
Cristian Romero (Tottenham Hotspur)	4
Jean-Clair Todibo (Nice)	4
Micky van de Ven (Tottenham Hotspur)	4
Kyle Walker (Manchester City)	4
Joao Cancelo (Barcelona)	3
Jeremie Frimpong (Bayer Leverkusen)	3
Gabriel (Arsenal)	3
Virgil van Dijk (Liverpool)	3
Alessandro Bastoni (Internazionale)	2
Bremer (Juventus)	2
Dante (Nice)	2
Alphonso Davies (Bayern Munich)	2
Ruben Dias (Manchester City)	2
Denzel Dumfries (Internazionale)	2
Josko Gvardiol (Manchester City)	2
Mario Hermoso (Atletico Madrid)	2
Mats Hummels (Borussia Dortmund)	2
Benjamin Pavard (Internazionale)	2
Antonio Rudiger (Real Madrid)	2
Ben White (Arsenal)	2
Francesco Acerbi (Internazionale)	1
Andreas Christensen (Barcelona)	1
Yan Couto (Girona)	1
Oscar De Marcos (Athletic Club)	1
Stefan de Vrij (Internazionale)	1
Federico Dimarco (Internazionale)	1
Achraf Hakimi (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Jules Kounde (Barcelona)	1
Nahuel Molina (Atletico Madrid)	1
David Raum (RB Leipzig)	1
Nico Schlotterbeck (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Filippo Terracciano (Verona)	1
Keiran Trippier (Newcastle United)	1
Fikayo Tomori (Milan)	1
Destiny Udogie (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
Axel Witsel (Atletico Madrid)	1

MIDFIELDERS

Jude Bellingham (Real Madrid)	21
James Maddison (Tottenham Hotspur)	9
Martin Odegaard (Arsenal)	4
Jamal Musiala (Bayern Munich)	3
Aleix Garcia (Girona)	2
Henrikh Mkhitaryan (Internazionale)	2
Adrien Rabiot (Juventus)	2
Rodri (Manchester City)	2
Dominik Szoboszlai (Liverpool)	2
Florian Wirtz (Bayer Leverkusen)	2
Hakan Calhanoglu (Internazionale)	1
Phil Foden (Manchester City)	1
Chris Fuhrich (Stuttgart)	1
Gavi (Barcelona)	1
Yangel Herrera (Girona)	1
Joshua Kimmich (Bayern Munich)	1
Teun Koopmeiners (Atalanta)	1
Takefusa Kubo (Real Sociedad)	1
Douglas Luiz (Aston Villa)	1
Scott McTominay (Manchester United)	1
Kaoru Mitoma (Brighton & Hove Albion)	1
Tijjani Reijnders (Milan)	1
Bernardo Silva (Manchester City)	1

FORWARDS

Harry Kane (Bayern Munich)	11
Erling Haaland (Manchester City)	9
Serhou Guirassy (Stuttgart)	8
Lautaro Martinez (Internazionale)	8
Kylian Mbappe (Paris Saint-Germain)	5
Son Heung-min (Tottenham Hotspur)	4
Victor Boniface (Bayer Leverkusen)	3
Alvaro Morata (Atletico Madrid)	3
Santiago Gimenez (Feyenoord)	2
Leroy Sane (Bayern Munich)	2
Julian Alvarez (Manchester City)	1
Jeremy Doku (Manchester City)	1
Edin Dzeko (Fenerbahce)	1
Evanilson (Porto)	1
Antoine Griezmann (Atletico Madrid)	1
Mauro Icardi (Galatasaray)	1
Bukayo Saka (Arsenal)	1
Mohamed Salah (Liverpool)	1
Savio (Girona)	1

ESM MEMBERS: *A Bola* (Portugal), *Fanatik* (Turkey), *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (Germany), *La Gazzetta dello Sport* (Italy), *Kicker* (Germany), *Marca* (Spain), *Nemzeti Sport* (Hungary), *Sport/Foot* (Belgium), *De Telegraaf* (Netherlands), *Tipsbladet* (Denmark), *ELF Voetbal* (Netherlands), *World Soccer* (England)

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Internationals

2026 WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

South America Section

● *6 direct slots available, plus 1 play-off slot*

Group A

Oct 12 – Barranquilla
Colombia 2 (James 35, Uribe 52)
Uruguay 2 (Olivera 47, Nunez 90+1 pen)
Colombia: Vargas – S. Arias (Y. Mosquera 90), Cuesta, Sanchez, Fabra; Uribe (Rios 67), Barrios; Borre (Sinisterra 80), J. Arias (Montero 90), Diaz; James (Carrascal 81).
Sent off: Vargas 87.
Uruguay: Mele – Nandez (De Arrascaeta 61), R. Araujo, S. Caceres, Piquerez (M. Olivera 46); Ugarte (M. Araujo 72), Valverde; Pellistri (C. Olivera 46), De la Cruz, B. Rodriguez (Vecino 72); Nunez.

Oct 12 – La Paz
Bolivia 1 (Ramallo 83)
Ecuador 2 (Paez 45, Rodriguez 90+6)
Bolivia: Viscarra – Medina (Miranda 81), H. Cuellar, Haquin, Jo. Sagredo, Roca; Arrascaita (H. Vaca 46), Justiniano (R. Vaca 70), Villarroel (Cespedes 67); Abrego (Ramallo 46), Martins.
Ecuador: Ramirez – Torres, Pacho, Hincapie, Chavez (B. Caicedo 78); Ortiz, M. Caicedo; Paez (Rodriguez 78), Cifuentes (Gruezo 56), Valencia; J. Caicedo (Preciado 56).

Oct 12 – Buenos Aires
Argentina 1 (Otamendi 3)
Paraguay 0
Argentina: Martinez – Molina, Romero, Otamendi, Tagliafico; De Paul (Lo Celso 90+4), Fernandez (Paredes 80), Mac Allister; Gonzalez (Ocampos 90+4), La. Martinez, Alvarez (Messi 53).
Paraguay: Coronel – Balbuena, Gomez, Alonso (Villalba 76); Ramirez (R. Rojas 46), Campuzano (Ojeda 71), Sanchez, Espinoza; Almiron (Avalos 86), Bareiro (Sanabria 70), Sosa.

Oct 12 – Santiago
Chile 2 (Valdes 74, Nunez 90+1)
Peru 0
Chile: Cortes – Catalan (Diaz 13), Medel, Maripan (Fernandez 46), Suazo; Mendez (Aranguiz 80), Pulgar; Echeverria, Valdes (Nunez 89), Brereton Diaz (Aravena 80); Sanchez.
Peru: Gallese – Corzo (Reyna 79), Zambrano (Santamaria 68), Abram, Trauco (Cartagena 68); Aquino, Yotun; Advincula, Gonzales (Carrillo 68), Polo (Lopez 46); Guerrero.

Oct 12 – Cuiaba
Brazil 1 (Gabriel 50)
Venezuela 1 (Bello 85)
Brazil: Ederson – Danilo (Couto 42), Marquinhos, Gabriel, Arana; Guimaraes (Gerson 79), Casemiro (Andre 79); Rodrygo, Neymar, Vinicius Junior (Cunha 79); Richarlison (Jesus 59).
Venezuela: Romo – Gonzalez, Osorio, Angel, Makoun; Machis (Soteldo 58), Herrera (Casseres 46), Rincon (Moreno 67), Sosa (Bello 79); Cordova (Savarino 46), Rondon.

Oct 17 – Maturin
Venezuela 3 (Soteldo 45+1, Rondon 72, Machis 79)
Chile 0
Venezuela: Romo – Gonzalez, Osorio, Angel, Navarro; Bello (Casseres 46), Jose Martinez (Moreno 65), Herrera (Rincon 57); Sosa (Machis 57), Rondon (Josef Martinez 87), Soteldo.
Chile: Cortes – Loyola, Medel, Diaz, Suazo; Mendez (Davila 68), Echeverria, Aranguiz (Nunez 46); Valdes (Osorio 22, Alarcon 81), Sanchez, Brereton Diaz (Aravena 68).
Sent off: Nunez 59.

Oct 17 – Asuncion
Paraguay 1 (Sanabria 69)
Bolivia 0
Paraguay: Coronel – Espinola (R. Rojas 67), Gomez, Alderete, Espinoza; Villasanti, Campuzano; Almiron, Romero (Avalos 61), Sosa (Villalba 45+2); Bareiro (Sanabria 67).
Bolivia: Viscarra – Medina, H. Cuellar (Chura 46), Haquin, Jo. Sagredo, Roca (Suarez 81); H. Vaca (Cespedes 81), Bejarano (Abrego 81), Villarroel; Ramallo (Villamil 46), Martins.

Oct 17 – Quito
Ecuador 0
Colombia 0
Ecuador: Ramirez – Torres, Pacho, Hincapie; Preciado (Hurtado 85), Paez (Mena 74), Gruezo, M. Caicedo, Chavez; Valencia (J. Caicedo 88), Rodriguez (Julio 74).
Colombia: Montero – Y. Mosquera (Ditta 86), Cuesta, Sanchez, Machado; Uribe (Rios 75), Castano (Barrios 88); J. Arias, James, Diaz; Borre (Duran 75).

Oct 17 – Montevideo
Uruguay 2 (Nunez 42, De la Cruz 77)
Brazil 0
Uruguay: Rochet – Nandez (Mendez 68), R. Araujo, S. Caceres, M. Olivera (Vina 84); Valverde, Ugarte; Pellistri (Piquerez 88), De la Cruz, M. Araujo (Vecino 87); Nunez.
Brazil: Ederson – Couto (Neres 73), Marquinhos, Gabriel, Augusto (Arana 73); Casemiro, Guimaraes (Veiga 84); Rodrygo, Neymar (Richarlison 45+4), Vinicius Junior (Cunha 84); Jesus.

Oct 17 – Lima
Peru 0
Argentina 2 (Messi 32, 42)
Peru: Gallese – Advincula, Santamaria (Tapia 46), Abram, Loyola (Trauco 46); Polo (Grimaldo 46), Cartagena, Yotun, Zanelatto (Pena 67); Carrillo; Guerrero (Reyna 46).
Argentina: Martinez – Montiel (Martinez Quarta 34), Romero (Pezzella 46), Otamendi, Tagliafico (Acuna 78); De Paul (Lo Celso 78), Mac Allister, Fernandez; Messi, Alvarez (La. Martinez 78), Gonzalez.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Argentina	4	4	0	0	7	0	12
Uruguay	4	2	1	1	8	5	7
Brazil	4	2	1	1	7	4	7
Venezuela	4	2	1	1	5	2	7
Colombia	4	1	3	0	3	2	6
Ecuador*	4	2	1	1	4	3	4
Paraguay	4	1	1	2	1	2	4
Chile	4	1	1	2	3	6	4
Peru	4	0	1	3	0	5	1
Bolivia	4	0	0	4	2	11	0

**Deducted 3 points*

ASIA Section

● *8 direct slots available, plus 1 play-off slot*

First Round – 1st Leg

Oct 12 – Dushanbe
Afghanistan 1 (Sharza 60)
Mongolia 0

Oct 12 – Male
Maldives 1 (Nazeem 87)
Bangladesh 1 (Saad 90+2)

Oct 12 – Singapore
Singapore 2 (Van Huizen 35, Mahler 41)
Guam 1 (Cunliffe 90)

Oct 12 – Khamis Mushait
Yemen 3 (Maher 33, Al Gahwashi 67, Al Matari 90+3)
Sri Lanka 0

Oct 12 – Yangon
Myanmar 5 (Lwin Moe Aung 39, 90+5, Soe Moe Kyaw 62, Aung Kaung Mann 81, Nay Moe Naing 90+1)
Macau 1 (Torrao 55)

Oct 12 – Phnom Penh
Cambodia 0
Pakistan 0

Oct 12 – Kaohsiung
Chinese Taipei 4 (Yu Yao-hsing 4, 60, Chen Ting-yang 57, Ko Yu-ting 88)
Timor-Leste 0

Oct 12 – Jakarta
Indonesia 6 (Dimas 7, 72, 90+2, Ridho 12, Sananta 63 pen, 67)
Brunei 0

Oct 12 – Hong Kong
Hong Kong 4 (Udebuluzor 10, 16, Chan 28, Norbu 35 og)
Bhutan 0

Oct 12 – Kathmandu
Nepal 1 (Bista 48)
Laos 1 (Bounkong 33)

First Round – 2nd Leg

Oct 17 – Ulaanbaatar
Mongolia 0
Afghanistan 1 (Noor 72)
Afghanistan win 2-0 on aggregate

Oct 17 – Dhaka
Bangladesh 2 (Rakib 11, Fahim 46)
Maldives 1 (Aisam 36)
Bangladesh win 3-2 on aggregate

Oct 17 – Dededo
Guam 0
Singapore 1 (Shawal 81)
Singapore win 3-1 on aggregate

Oct 17 – Colombo
Sri Lanka 1 (Rathnayake 89)
Yemen 1 (Al Matari 4)
Yemen win 4-1 on aggregate

Oct 17 – Macau
Macau 0
Myanmar 0
Myanmar win 5-1 on aggregate

Oct 17 – Islamabad
Pakistan 1 (Hamid 68)
Cambodia 0
Pakistan win 1-0 on aggregate

Oct 17 – Kaohsiung
Timor-Leste 0
Chinese Taipei 3 (Yu Chia-huang 18, Wu Yen-shu 21, Kouame 24)
Chinese Taipei win 7-0 on aggregate

Oct 17 – Bandar Seri Begawan
Brunei 0
Indonesia 6 (Hokky 6, 44, Egy 42, Witan 47 pen, Ridho 63, Sananta 82)
Indonesia win 12-0 on aggregate

Oct 17 – Thimphu
Bhutan 2 (Gyeltshen 28, Chogyal 47)
Hong Kong 0
Hong Kong win 4-2 on aggregate

Oct 17 – Vientiane
Laos 0
Nepal 1 (Dangi 53)
Nepal win 2-1 on aggregate

EURO 2024 QUALIFIERS

Group A

Oct 12 – Larnaca
Cyprus 0
Norway 4 (Sorloth 33, Haaland 65, 72, Aursnes 81)
Cyprus: Mall – Andreou, Karo, Gogic, Kyprianou, Anderson Correia; Kyriakou (Spoljaric 54), Kousoulos (Gavriel 78), Charalampous (Pileas 60); Kastanos (Korrea 78), Kakoullis (Ilia 54).
Norway: Nyland – Ryerson, Ajer, Ostigard, Meling; Odegaard (Thorstvedt 78), Berge, Aursnes (Finne 88); Sorloth (Nusa 64), Haaland (Strand Larsen 77), Solbakken (Bobb 63).

Oct 12 – Seville
Spain 2 (Morata 73, Sancet 86)
Scotland 0
Spain: Simon – Carvajal (Navas 67), Le Normand, Laporte, Balde (F. Garcia 46); Gavi, Rodri, Merino (Sancet 67); F. Torres, Morata (Joselu 84), Oyarzabal (Zaragoza 46).
Scotland: Gunn – Hickey, Porteous (Gilmour 87), Hendry, McKenna, Robertson (Patterson 44); McGinn, McTominay, McGregor (McLean 87), Christie (Armstrong 79); Dykes (Adams 79).

Oct 15 – Tbilisi
Georgia 4 (Kiteishvili 46, Kvaratskhelia 58, Shengelia 82, Mikautadze 90+5 pen)
Cyprus 0
Georgia: Mamardashvili – Mamuchashvili, Kvirkvelia, Kashia, Lochoshvili, Azarovi (Shengelia 71); Chakvetadze (Davitashvili 71), Kiteishvili (Kvekveskiri 85), Kochorashvili; Zivzivadze (Mikautadze 58), Kvaratskhelia (Mekvabishvili 85).
Cyprus: Mall – Andreou (Antoniou 46), Karo, Gogic, Kyprianou, Ioannou (Anderson Correia 87); Kousoulos, Spoljaric, Kyriakou (Charalampous 62); Christofi (Kakoullis 71), Kastanos (Loizou 70).

Oct 15 – Oslo
Norway 0
Spain 1 (Gavi 49)
Norway: Nyland – Ryerson, Strandberg (Ajer 77), Ostigard, Meling; Berg (Nusa 58), Berge; Bobb (Sorloth 58), Odegaard, Aursnes (Thorstvedt 77); Haaland.
Spain: Simon – Carvajal, Le Normand (D. Garcia 46), Laporte, F. Garcia; Gavi (Sancet 79), Rodri, Fabian; F. Torres (Pedraza 71), Morata (Joselu 89), Fati (Oyarzabal 46).

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Spain (Q)	6	5	0	1	19	3	15
Scotland (Q)	6	5	0	1	12	3	15
Norway	7	3	1	3	11	9	10
Georgia	6	2	1	3	9	13	7
Cyprus	7	0	0	7	2	25	0

Group B

Oct 13 – Amsterdam
Netherlands 1 (Hartman 83)
France 2 (Mbappe 7, 53)
Netherlands: Verbruggen – Geertruida, Van Dijk, Ake (Van de Ven 80), Hartman; De Roon (Wieffer 46), Veerman; Dumfries (Frimpong 62), Reijnders, Simons (Bergwijn 80); Weghorst (Malen 38).
France: Maignan – Clauss (Gusto 80), Konate, L. Hernandez, T. Hernandez; Griezmann (Fofana 87), Tchouameni, Rabiot; Coman (Girous 71), Kolo Muani (Thuram 80), Mbappe.

Oct 13 – Dublin
Republic of Ireland 0
Greece 2 (Giakoumakis 20, Masouras 45+4)
Republic of Ireland: Bazunu – Doherty, Duffy, Collins (Manning 46); Ogbene (Idah 85), Browne (Johnston 70), Cullen, Scales; Smallbone (Robinson 70), Knight; Ferguson.
Greece: Vlachodimos – Rota, Mavropanos, Retsos, Tsimikas; Bakasetas (Siopsis 88), Kourbelis (Bouchalakis 64), Mantalos; Masouras (Koulierakis 88), Giakoumakis (Ioannidis 70), Pelkas (Chatzigiovanis 64).

Oct 16 – Faro
Gibraltar 0
Republic of Ireland 4 (Ferguson 8, Johnston 28, Doherty 60, Robinson 80)
Gibraltar: Coleing – Sergeant, R. Chipolina (De Haro 83), Mouelhi, Olivero (Casciaro 68); Annesley; Ronan (J. Chipolina 83), Walker, Pozo (Coombes 68), Britto; De Barr (El Hmidi 69).
Republic of Ireland: Bazunu – Doherty, Duffy, Scales (O'Shea 74), Manning; Knight, Cullen (Molumby 74), McGrath; Ogbene (Sykes 83), Ferguson (Idah 66), Johnston (Robinson 66).

Oct 16 – Athens
Greece 0
Netherlands 1 (Van Dijk 90+3 pen)
Greece: Vlachodimos – Rota, Mavropanos, Retsos, Koulierakis (Siopsis 61), Tsimikas; Masouras (Giakoumakis 77), Kourbelis (Bouchalakis 60), Mantalos (Pavlidis 81); Bakasetas (Fountas 61), Ioannidis.
Netherlands: Verbruggen – Geertruida (Malen 46), Van Dijk, Ake, Hartman (Van de Ven 74); Wieffer (De Roon 81), Reijnders; Dumfries, Simons (Veerman 62), Bergwijn; Weghorst (Brobbey 62).

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
France (Q)	6	6	0	0	13	1	18
Netherlands	6	4	0	2	10	7	12
Greece	7	4	0	3	12	6	12
Rep of Ireland	7	2	0	5	9	9	6
Gibraltar	6	0	0	6	0	21	0

Group C

Oct 14 – Prague
Ukraine 2 (Sudakov 30, Karavayev 90+5)
North Macedonia 0
Ukraine: Trubin – Konoplya, Zabarnyi, Matviyenko, Mykolenko; Stepanenko, Zinchenko (Sydorchuk 76); Zubkov (Malinovskyi 68), Sudakov (Svatok 87), Mudryk (Karavayev 88); Dovbyk (Yaremchuk 76).
North Macedonia: Dimitrievski – Manev (Churlinov 46), Serafimov, Musliu; Ashkovski (Dimoski 46), Elezi (Doriev 74), Atanasov (Ademi 63), Alioski; Bardhi; Miovski (Trajkovski 84), Elmas.

Oct 14 – Bari
Italy 4 (Bonaventura 23, Berardi 45+1, 64, Frattesi 90+3)
Malta 0
Italy: Donnarumma – Darmian, Mancini, Bastoni, Dimarco (Udogie 79); Barella (Frattesi

65), Locatelli, Bonaventura (Biraghi 87); Berardi (Orsolini 65), Raspadori, Kean (Scamacca 79).
Malta: Bonello – J. Mbong (Attard 66), Apap, Pepe, Z. Muscat, Camenzuli; Yankam (Nwoko 84), Kristensen (N. Muscat 66), Guillaumier; Montebello (Satariano 55), P. Mbong (Paiber 84).

Oct 17 – Wembley
England 3 (Kane 32 pen, 77, Rashford 58)
Italy 1 (Scamacca 15)
England: Pickford – Walker, Stones (Guehi 63), Maguire, Trippier; Phillips (Henderson 70), Rice; Foden, Bellingham (Grealish 85), Rashford; Kane.
Italy: Donnarumma – Di Lorenzo, Scalvini, Acerbi (Bastoni 63), Udogie (Dimarco 63); Frattesi, Cristante, Barella; Berardi (Raspadori 78), Scamacca (Kean 63), El Shaarawy (Orsolini 87).

Oct 17 – Ta'Qali
Malta 1 (P. Mbong 12)
Ukraine 3 (Camenzuli 38 og, Dovbyk 43 pen, Mudryk 85)
Malta: Bonello – J. Mbong (Attard 79), S. Borg, Pepe, J. Borg, Camenzuli; Yankam (Pisani 86), Guillaumier, N. Muscat (Kristensen 69); Nwoko (Satariano 69), P. Mbong (Montebello 86).
Ukraine: Trubin – Karavayev (Zubkov 76), Zabarnyi, Matviyenko (Svatok 46), Mykolenko; Sydorchuk, Zinchenko (Pikhalyonok 87); Vanat (Konoplya 67), Sudakov (Nazarnya 67), Mudryk; Dovbyk.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
England (Q)	6	5	1	0	19	3	16
Ukraine	7	4	1	2	11	8	13
Italy	6	3	1	2	11	7	10
N. Macedonia	6	2	1	3	7	14	7
Malta	7	0	0	7	2	18	0

Group D

Oct 12 – Riga
Latvia 2 (J. Ikaunieks 39, Balodis 68)
Armenia 0
Latvia: Ozols – Savalnieks (Sorokins 88), Oss, Balodis, Ciganiks; Emsis, Savaljevs; Jaunzems (D. Ikaunieks 88), J. Ikaunieks, Daskevics (Dubra 55); Uldrikis (Regza 82).
Sent off: Oss 52.
Armenia: Cancarevic – Dashyan, Harutyunyan, Haroyan, Mkrtchyan (Ranos 59), Tiknizyan; Barseghyan (Sevikyan 69), Iwu, Spertsyan, Briasco (Serobyan 69); Zelaryan (Bichakhchyan 82).

Oct 12 – Osijek
Croatia 0
Turkey 1 (Yilmaz 30)
Croatia: Livakovic – Stanisic, Sutalo, Gvardiol, Barisic (Sosa 80); Modric, Brozovic, Kovacic (Beljo 80); Pasalic (Majer 62), Musa (Petkovic 63), Brekalo (Vlasic 63).
Turkey: Cakir – Kadioglu, Akaydin, Bardakci, Ozkacar; Yuksek (Ayhan 86), Ozcan; Kahveci (Akgun 65), Calhanoglu, Akturkoglu (Yildiz 86); Yilmaz (Yildirim 75).

Oct 15 – Konya
Turkey 4 (Akgun 58, Tosun 84, 90+2, Akturkoglu 88)
Latvia 0
Turkey: Cakir – Kadioglu (Celik 46), Akaydin, Bardakci, Ozkacar; Yuksek; Akgun (Sari 76), Calhanoglu (Ayhan 86), Ozcan (Kutlu 68), Akturkoglu; Yilmaz (Tosun 75).
Latvia: Ozols – Savalnieks, Dubra, Balodis, Ciganiks; Tobers, Savaljevs (Emsis 46); Jaunzems (D. Ikaunieks 86), J. Ikaunieks, Daskevics (Krollis 59); Uldrikis (Regza 75).

Oct 15 – Cardiff
Wales 2 (Wilson 47, 60)
Croatia 1 (Pasalic 75)
Wales: Ward – Mepham, Rodon, B. Davies; Roberts, J. James, Ampadu, Williams; Brooks (D. James 57), Wilson (Broadhead 81); Moore.
Croatia: Livakovic – Juranovic (Stanisic 46), Vida, Gvardiol, Barisic (Sosa 59); Modric, Brozovic, Kovacic; Majer, Musa (Beljo 46), Brekalo (Pasalic 46).

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Turkey (Q)	7	5	1	1	13	6	16
Wales	6	3	1	2	8	8	10
Croatia	6	3	1	2	10	4	10
Armenia	6	2	1	3	8	9	7
Latvia	7	1	0	6	5	17	3

Group E

Oct 12 – Tirana
Albania 3 (Asani 9, Seferi 51, 73)
Czech Republic 0
Albania: Berisha – Hysaj, Ajeti, Djimsiti, Mitaj; Asllani, Ramadani; Asani (Muja 54), Bajrami (Muci 67), Seferi (Gjasula 86); Cikalleshi (Daku 67).
Czech Rep: Pavlenka – Holes (Provod 46), Brabec, Krejci; Coufal, Soucek, Sadilek, Jurasek (Doudera 86); Cerny (Hlozek 64), Chytil, Kuchta (Cvancara 64).
Sent off: Chytil 39.

Oct 12 – Toshavn
Faroe Islands 0
Poland 2 (S. Szymanski 4, Buksa 65)
Faroe Islands: Lamhauge – Joensen, Faero, Askham, Davidsen; G. Vatnhamar; Bjartalid (Johansen 76), Hendriksen Olsen (Jonsson 76), Andreasen (Danielsen 83), S. Vatnhamar (Radosavljevic 90); J. Edmundsson (Petersen 76).
Sent off: Askham 48.
Poland: Szczesny – Kedziora, Peda, Kiwior; Cash (Wszolek 59), Slisz, Dziczek (Piotrowski 82), Frankowski; S. Szymanski (Swiderski 59), Zielinski (Marchwinski 87); Milik (Buksa 59).

Oct 15 – Plzen
Czech Republic 1 (Soucek 76 pen)
Faroe Islands 0
Czech Republic: Mandous – Doudera (Masopust 77), Holes, Krejci, Jurasek (Provod 57); Soucek, Sadilek; Cerny (Jurecka 77), Lingr (Brabec, 90+1), Hlozek; Cvancara (Kuchta 56).
Faroe Islands: Lamhauge – Joensen, A. Edmundson, Faero, Nattestad, Davidsen; S. Vatnhamar (Johansen 84), Hendriksen Olsen, Andreasen (K. Olse 84), Jonsson (Bjartalid 58); Petersen (J. Edmundsson 77).

Oct 15 – Warsaw
Poland 1 (Swiderski 53)
Moldova 1 (Nicolaescu 26)
Poland: Szczesny – Kedziora (Grosicki 84), Peda, Kiwior; Wszolek (Kaminski 71), Dziczek (Slisz 46), Zielinski, Frankowski; S. Szymanski (Marchwinski 71), Milik (Buksa 71), Swiderski.
Moldova: Railean – Revenco (S. Platica 70), Craciun, Baboglo, Marandici, Reabciuk; Postolachi, Motpan (M. Platica 70), Rata (S. Cojocari 79), M. Cojocaru (Damascan 60); Nicolaescu (Bogaciuc 79).

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Albania	6	4	1	1	11	3	13
Czech Rep	6	3	2	1	8	5	11
Poland	7	3	1	3	9	9	10
Moldova	6	2	3	1	6	6	9
Faroe Islands	7	0	1	6	2	13	1

Group F

Oct 13 – Tallinn
Estonia 0
Azerbaijan 2 (Bayramov 9, Sheydayev 45+4 pen)
Estonia: Hein – Peetson, Paskotsi, Kuusk; Miller (Sinyavskiy 63), Vassiljev (Zenjov 63), Poom (Vetkal 63), Pikk; Anier (Kallaster 85), Kait; Tunjov (Vastsuk 74).
Azerbaijan: Magomedaliyev – Mammadov (Hasanalizada 64), Haghverdi, Kryvotsyuk; Bayramov (Aliyev 75), Diniyev, Isayev (Camalov 69), Cafarguliyev; Mahmudov (Ozobic 75); Emreli (Dadashov 70), Sheydayev.

Oct 13 – Vienna
Austria 2 (Laimer 72, Sabitzer 84 pen)
Belgium 3 (Lukebakio 12, 55, Lukaku 58)
Austria: A. Schlager – Seiwald, Danso (Baidoo 66), Lienhart, Wober (Prass 71); Laimer, Grillistsch, X. Schlager, Wimmer (Sabitzer 79); Baumgartner (Cham 66); Sarkaria (Kalajdzic 66).
Belgium: Sels – Castagne, Faes, Vertonghen, Theate; Mangala (Tielemans 64), Onana, Openda (Carrasco 46); Lukebakio (Bakayoko 71, Vermeeren 87), Lukaku, Doku (Keita 88).
Sent off: Onana 78.

Oct 16 – Baku
Azerbaijan 0
Austria 1 (Sabitzer 48 pen)
Azerbaijan: Magomedaliyev – Mammadov, Haghverdi, Kryvotsyuk; Bayramov, Diniyev (Safarov 65), Isayev (Emreli 68), Cafarguliyev (Aliyev 83); Mahmudov; Dadashov (Qurbanli 83), Sheydayev.
Austria: A. Schlager – Seiwald, Lienhart, Wober, Prass (Baumgartner 46); Grillistsch; Laimer, Schmid (Sabitzer 46), X. Schlager, Kainz (Wimmer 46); Kalajdzic (Burgstaller 82).
Sent off: Burgstaller 90+4.

Oct 16 – Brussels
Belgium 1 (Lukaku 31 pen)
Sweden 1 (Gyokeres 15)
Match abandoned at half-time but result final
Belgium: Sels – Castagne, Faes, Vertonghen, Theate; Bakayoko, Tielemans, Mangala, Carrasco; De Ketelaere, Lukaku.
Sweden: Olsen – Wahlqvist, Lindelof, Helander, Augustinsson; Svanberg, Cajuste, Ekdal, Forsberg; Kulusevski, Gyokeres.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Belgium (Q)	7	5	2	0	17	4	17
Austria (Q)	7	5	1	1	15	7	16
Sweden	6	2	1	3	12	9	7
Azerbaijan	6	1	1	4	4	12	4
Estonia	6	0	1	5	2	18	1

Group G

Oct 14 – Sofia
Bulgaria 0
Lithuania 2 (Sirvys 45, 55)
Bulgaria: Dyulgerov – Dimitrov, Antov (Petrov 46), Gruev; Popov, Chochev (L. Petkov 46), Kraev, M. Petkov (Turtisov 85); Despodov, Borukov (Rusev 46), Delev (Ivanov 79).
Sent off: Kraev 42.
Lithuania: Zubas – Utkus, Klimavicius, Lekiatas; Lasickas, Vorobjovas, Gineitis (Remeikis 70), Sirvys (Beneta 85); Slivka (Jankauskas 78), Paulauskas (Steponavicius 85), Cernych (Novikovas 70).

Oct 14 – Budapest
Hungary 2 (B. Varga 20, Sallai 34)
Serbia 1 (Pavlovic 33)
Hungary: Dibusz – Fiola (Botka 74), Lang, A. Szalai; Nego (Bolla 63), A. Nagy, Styles (Kalmar 63), Kerkez; Sallai (Kata 74), Szoboszlai; B. Varga (Adam 84).
Sent off: Kalmar 90+7.
Serbia: N. Milinkovic-Savic – Erakovic (Tadic 46), Milenkovic, Pavlovic; Zivkovic (Radonjic 75), Lukic (Ratkov 84), Gudelj, Terzic (Kostic 46); Gacinovic (Djuricic 67), S. Milinkovic-Savic; A. Mitrovic.

Oct 17 – Kaunas
Lithuania 2 (Cernych 20, Sirvys 36)
Hungary 2 (Szoboszlai 67 pen, B. Varga 82)
Lithuania: Zubas – Utkus (Kazukolovas 64), Girdvainis, Lekiatas; Lasickas, Vorobjovas, Gineitis, Sirvys (Beneta 76); Slivka (Novikovas 90), Paulauskas, Cernych (Jankauskas 65).
Hungary: Dibusz – Fiola, Lang, A. Szalai; Nego (Csoboth 62), Gazdag (Styles 46), A. Nagy, Kerkez (Z. Nagy 46); Sallai (Bolla 90+2), Szoboszlai; B. Varga (Adam 90+2).

Oct 17 – Belgrade
Serbia 2 (A. Mitrovic 9, 73, Tadic 77)
Montenegro 1 (Jovetic 36)
Serbia: N. Milinkovic-Savic – Milenkovic, Veljkovic, Pavlovic; Zivkovic (Babic 90), Ilic (S. Milinkovic-Savic 46), Gudelj (Maksimovic 68), Mladenovic (Kostic 46); Tadic, Lukic (Samardzic 79), A. Mitrovic.
Montenegro: Mijatovic – Tuci (Raickovic 85), Savic, Tomasevic; Marusic, Jankovic (Osmajic 85), Kuc (Mugosa 85), Camaj (Jovovic 72), Vukcevic (Radunovic 31); Krstovic, Jovetic.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Hungary	6	4	2	0	11	4	14
Serbia	7	4	1	2	13	7	13
Montenegro	6	2	2	2	6	8	8
Lithuania	7	1	3	3	8	12	6
Bulgaria	6	0	2	4	3	10	2

Group H

Oct 14 – Belfast
Northern Ireland 3 (Smyth 5, Magennis 11, McMenamin 81)
San Marino 0
Northern Ireland: Hazard – Hume, Ballard, Evans (Price 63), Lewis (Spencer 79); McNair, S. Charles, Thompson; Smyth (Marshall 63), Magennis (Washington 63), Taylor (McMenamin 79).
San Marino: E. Benedettini – Ma. Battistini, Fabbri, Di Maio, Rossi, Franciosi (D'Addario 46); A. Golinucci, Capicchioni (Ceccaroli 76), Lazzari (Lunadei 88); Nanni, Vitaioli (Mularoni 60).

Oct 14 – Ljubljana
Slovenia 3 (Sesko 1 pen, 28, Janza 90+2)
Finland 0
Slovenia: Oblak – Karnicik, Blazic, Bijol, Janza; Stojanovic (Stankovic 90+4), Cerin, Elsnik, Mlakar (Verbic 80); Sporar (Kurtic 80), Sesko (Vipotnik 60).
Finland: Hradecky – Hoskonen, Ivanov (Forss 77), L. Vaisanen; Alho, Kairinen, Schuller (Hakans 46), Uronen; Kallman (Pohjanpalo 46), Kamara; Pukki.

Oct 14 – Copenhagen
Denmark 3 (Wind 36, Skov 45+1, 48)
Kazakhstan 0
Denmark: Schmeichel – Andersen, Kjaer, Christensen; Maehle, Hojbjerg, Eriksen, Skov (Kristensen 69); Hojlund (Lindstrom 90+1), Dohlberg (Poulsen 69), Wind (Norgaard 83).
Kazakhstan: Shatskiy – Bystrov, Marochkin, Alip; Kairov, Zaynutdinov (Darabayev 75), Beisebekov (Kuat 62), Dosmagambetov (Vorogovskiy 46); Samorodov (Chesnokov 80), Aymbetov (Tagybergen 46), Orazov.

Oct 17 – Helsinki
Finland 1 (Taylor 28)
Kazakhstan 2 (Zaynutdinov 77 pen, 89)
Finland: Hradecky – Hoskonen, Ivanov, Jensen (Uronen 88); Alho (Soiri 88), Kairinen, Kamara, Taylor (Kallman 77); Pohjanpalo, Pukki (Forss 77), Hakans.
Kazakhstan: Shatskiy – Bystrov, Marochkin, Alip; Kairov (Skortsov 86), Zaynutdinov, Beisebekov (Kuat 55), Tagybergen (Tapalov 86), Vorogovskiy; Orazov, Samorodov (Aymbetov 85).

Oct 17 – Belfast
Northern Ireland 0
Slovenia 1 (Cerin 5)
Northern Ireland: Peacock-Farrell – Hume, Toal, Evans, Lewis; S. Charles; Smyth (D. Charles 63), Lyons (McMenamin 86), Thompson (Price 63), Taylor (Saville 62); Magennis (Washington 46).
Sent off: S. Charles 58.
Slovenia: Oblak – Karnicik, Blazic, Bijol, Janza (Verbic 84); Stojanovic, Cerin, Elsnik, Mlakar (Lovric 75); Sporar (Kurtic 76), Sesko.

Oct 17 – Serravalle
San Marino 1 (A. Golinucci 61)
Denmark 2 (Hojlund 42, Poulsen 70)
San Marino: E. Benedettini – Fabbri (Franciosi 88), Rossi, Cevoli (Vitaioli 74); D'Addario (Capicchioni 55), A. Golinucci, Mi. Battistini (Ma. Battistini 56), Mularoni, Tosi; Nanni, Lazzari (Di Maio 75).
Denmark: Schmeichel – Jelert (Skov 62), Kjaer, Andersen, Maehle (Kristensen 90+2); Hojbjerg, Norgaard, Eriksen; Lindstrom (Poulsen 62), Hojlund (Jensen 90+2), Daramy (Wind 62).

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Slovenia	8	6	1	1	17	6	19
Denmark	8	6	1	1	17	7	19
Kazakhstan	8	5	0	3	12	9	15
Finland	8	4	0	4	12	9	12
N. Ireland	8	2	0	6	7	9	6
San Marino	8	0	0	8	1	26	0

Group I

Oct 12 – Andorra la Vella
Andorra 0
Kosovo 3 (Rashica 26, 71, Zeqiri 83)
Andorra: Alvarez – C. Rubio, M. Vales, Llovera (Pomares 88), San Nicolas, Cervos; Alaez (M. Garcia 56), Rebes (M. Vieira 75), E. Vales (Pujol 56), Fernandez (Sanchez 75); Cucu.
Kosovo: Muric – Dellova, Aliti, Hajziri (Bytyqi 46); Hardgjonaj, Loshaj (Fazliji 46), Zyba (B. Berisha 76), Muslija (Zeqiri 75), Vojvoda; Rashica; Al. Rrahmani (Korenica 66).

Oct 12 – Budapest
Belarus 0
Romania 0
Belarus: Ignatovich – Yuzepchuk (Karpovich 73), Volkov, Politevich, Polyakov, Pechenin; Korzun, Ebong (Bocherov 73), Klimovich (Gromyko 83); Morozov (Bakhar 73), Kontsevoy (Karpitskiy 90+1).
Romania: Moldovan – Ratiu, Dragusin, Burca, Bancu; Screciu (Olaru 77); Man (Morutan 61), R. Marin, Stanciu (Mihaila 84), Dragus (Munteanu 77); Alibec (Hagi 62).

Oct 15 – St Gallen
Switzerland 3 (Shaqiri 28, Akanji 89, Amdouni 90)
Belarus 3 (Ebong 61, Polyakov 69, Antilevsky 84)
Switzerland: Sommer – Lotomba, Akanji, Schar, Rodriguez (Garcia 73); Freuler, Xhaka; Shaqiri, Sow (Amdouni 62), Steffen (Ndoye 73); Itten (Zeqiri 62).
Belarus: Ignatovich – Karpovich, Volkov, Politevich, Polyakov, Malkevich (Klimovich 83); Ebong, Korzun (Pavlovets 90+5), Bocherov (Morozov 65), Bakhar (Pechenin 64); Kontsevoy (Antilevskiy 46).

Oct 15 – Bucharest
Romania 4 (Stanciu 23, Hagi 28, R. Marin 44 pen, Coman 50)
Andorra 0
Romania: Moldovan – Sorescu, Dragusin (Rus 46), Burca, Bancu; R. Marin (Cicaldau 59), Stanciu (M. Marin 65); Morutan, Hagi (Alibec 65), Coman; Birligea (Mihaila 59).

Andorra: Alvarez – C. Rubio (De Pablos 65), Llovera, M. Vales, San Nicolas, M. Garcia (Pomares 86); E. Vales (J. Rubio 76), Rebes (Pujol 86), M. Vieira, Cervos; Sanchez (Bernat 65).
Sent off: San Nicolas 90+1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Romania	8	4	4	0	13	4	16
Switzerland	7	4	3	0	20	8	15
Israel	6	3	2	1	7	7	11
Kosovo	7	1	4	2	8	8	7
Belarus	8	1	3	4	7	14	6
Andorra	8	0	2	6	3	17	2

Group J

Oct 13 – Reykjavik
Iceland 1 (Oskarsson 23)
Luxembourg 1 (Rodrigues 46)
Iceland: Runarsson – Sampsted, Palsson, Ingason, Finsson; Wilumsson (Thorsteinsson 70), Traustason, Bergmann Johanesson (G. Sigurdsson 70), A. Sigurdsson (Anderson 85); Oskarsson (Finnbogason 70), Haraldsson.
Luxembourg: Moris – Dzogovic (Jans 46), Mahmutovic, Chanot, Carlson, Pinto (O. Thill 85); V. Thill (Olesen 61), Sinani, C. Martins, Barreiro; Curci (Rodrigues 46).

Oct 13 – Vaduz
Liechtenstein 0
Bosnia & Herzegovina 2 (Rahmanovic 13, Stevanovic 41)
Liechtenstein: Buchel – S. Wolfinger (Schlegel 33, Hasler 90+7), Malin (Martin Maxer 71), Wieser, Hofer; Luchinger, Buchel, Sele, Goppel; Notaro (Kindle 71), Salanovic (Meier 90+7).
Bosnia & Herzegovina: Sehic – Dedic (Gazibegovic 90+3), Barisic (Gojkovic 78), Hadzikadunic, Kolasinac; Pjanic (Hadziahmetovic 78), Cimirot; Stevanovic, Rahmanovic, Demirovic; Dzeko (Bilbija 87).

Oct 13 – Porto
Portugal 3 (Ramos 18, Ronaldo 29 pen, 72)
Slovakia 2 (Hancko 69, Lobotka 80)
Portugal: Costa – Cancelo, Antonio Silva, Dias, Dalot; Palhinha (Otavio 86); B. Silva (R. Neves 86), Fernandes, Leao (Felix 65); Ronaldo, Ramos (Jota 87).
Slovakia: Dubravka – Pekarik (Tomic 76), Vavro, Skriniar, Hancko; Kucka (Benes 46), Lobotka, Duda; Schranz (Duris 87), Bozenik (Polievka 65), Mak (Suslov 46).

Oct 16 – Zenica
Bosnia & Herzegovina 0
Portugal 5 (Ronaldo 5 pen, 20, Fernandes 25, Cancelo 32, Felix 41)
Bosnia & Herzegovina: Sehic (Vasilj 72) – Dedic, Barisic (Gojkovic 72), Hadzikadunic, Kolasinac; Stevanovic (Hamulic 66), Pjanic, Cimirot, Demirovic (Gazibegovic 46); Rahmanovic (Hadziahmetovic 46); Dzeko.
Portugal: Costa – Dalot, Dias, Inacio, Cancelo; Fernandes (R. Neves 79), Otavio (J. Neves 85), Danilo, Felix (Vitinha 79); Leao (Neto 66); Ronaldo (Jota 66).

Oct 16 – Reykjavik
Iceland 4 (G. Sigurdsson 22 pen, 49, Finnbogason 44, Haraldsson 63)
Liechtenstein 0
Iceland: Olafsson – Sampsted, Palsson, Ingason, Finsson; Traustason (Gunnarsson 80), G. Sigurdsson (Bergmann Johanesson 58), Haraldsson; Wilumsson (Anderson 57), Finnbogason (Oskarsson 57), Thorsteinsson (Gudjohnsen 80).
Liechtenstein: Buchel – Martin Maxer, Wieser, Trauber; Meier (Netzer 71), Luchinger (Beck 75), Buchel (Lorenz 71), Sele, Goppel; Salanovic (Kindle 90+1), Hasler (Notaro 90+1).

Oct 16 – Luxembourg
Luxembourg 0
Slovakia 1 (Duris 77)
Luxembourg: Moris – M. Martins, Chanot, Gerson, Jans (Carlson 88); Sinani, Olesen, C. Martins, Barreiro, V. Thill (Curci 88); Rodrigues.
Slovakia: Dubravka – Pekarik (Gyomber 90+4), Vavro, Skriniar, Hancko; Kucka, Lobotka, Duda (Hrosovsky 88); Schranz (Duris 63), Polievka (Bozenik 63), Suslov.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Portugal (Q)	8	8	0	0	32	2	24
Slovakia	8	5	1	2	11	5	16
Luxembourg	8	3	2	3	8	18	11
Iceland	8	3	1	4	15	10	10
Bosnia-Herz	8	3	0	5	7	14	9
Liechtenstein	8	0	0	8	1	25	0

2023-24 CONCACAF NATIONS LEAGUE

League A

Group A

Oct 13 – Willemstad
Curacao 1 (Janga 90+4)
Panama 2 (Barcenas 29, Rodriguez 77)

Oct 13 – Fort-de-France
Martinique 1 (Marajo 23)
El Salvador 0

Oct 13 – Port of Spain
Trinidad & Tobago 3 (Jones 36 pen, Moore 54, James 89)
Guatemala 2 (Rubin 12, Santis 31)

Oct 17 – Panama City
Panama 3 (Carrasquilla 14, Davis 48 pen, Ayarza 90)
Guatemala 0

Oct 17 – San Salvador
El Salvador 0
Martinique 0

Oct 17 – Willemstad
Curacao 5 (Janga 7, 81, Roemeratoe 12, Gorre 56 pen, Bacuna 78 pen)
Trinidad & Tobago 3 (Moore 68, Lee-Him 74, Moses 86)

Final standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Panama*	4	3	1	0	9	2	10
Trinidad & Tobago*	4	3	0	1	10	9	9
Martinique	4	2	1	1	2	3	7
Guatemala	4	1	1	2	5	7	4
Curacao (R)	4	1	0	3	6	7	3
El Salvador (R)	4	0	1	3	2	6	1

**Advance to the quarter-finals*

Group B

Oct 12 – Paramaribo
Suriname 1 (Haps 17)
Haiti 1 (Cantave 51)

Oct 12 – St George's
Grenada 1 (T. Williams 30)
Jamaica 4 (R. Williams 12, Nicholson 22, Gray 74, Decordova-Reid 87)

Oct 12 – Santo Domingo
Cuba 0
Honduras 0

Oct 15 – Port of Spain
Haiti 2 (Pierrot 15, 87)
Jamaica 3 (Gray 18, Nicholson 57, Bailey 66)

Oct 15 – Tegucigalpa
Honduras 4 (Maldonado 9, Lozano 13, Quioto 67 pen, Rochez 90+1)
Cuba 0

Oct 15 – Paramaribo
Suriname 4 (Van der Kust 12, Vlijter 27, Abena 35, Bedeau 45+3 og)
Grenada 0

Final standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Jamaica*	4	3	1	0	10	5	10
Honduras*	4	2	1	1	8	1	7
Suriname	4	1	2	1	6	3	5
Cuba	4	1	2	1	1	4	5
Haiti (R)	4	0	3	1	5	6	3
Grenada (R)	4	0	1	3	2	13	1

**Advance to the quarter-finals*

League B

Group A

Oct 12 – The Valley
Sint Maarten 2 (Lake 19, Kort 79)
Saint Kitts & Nevis 3 (Williams 16, 48, 68)

Oct 12 – Gros Islet
Saint Lucia 2 (Elva 45, Mac Farlane 58)
Guadeloupe 1 (Roussillon 29)

Oct 15 – Sainte-Anne
Guadeloupe 2 (Plumain 52 pen, 71)
Saint Lucia 0

Oct 15 – Basseterre
Saint Kitts & Nevis 0
Sint Maarten 1 (Pata 31)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Guadeloupe	4	3	0	1	9	3	9
Saint Lucia	4	3	0	1	9	4	9
St Kitts & Nevis	4	1	0	3	4	7	3
Sint Maarten	4	1	0	3	4	12	3

Group B

Oct 13 – Wildey
Montserrat 0
Nicaragua 3 (Perez 5, Medina 72, Montes 90+4)

Oct 13 – Wildey
Barbados 0
Dominican Republic 5 (Romero 7, Reyes 21, Griffith 45 og, Morschel 57, Alba 88)

Oct 16 – Managua
Nicaragua 3 (Perez 38, Coronel 43, Moldskred Belli 48)
Montserrat 0

Oct 16 – Santiago de los Caballeros
Dominican Republic 5 (Alba 17, Romero 30, 48, 79, Morschel 59)
Barbados 2 (Gale 10 pen, 66 pen)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nicaragua	4	4	0	0	13	1	12
Dominican Rep	4	3	0	1	13	4	9
Montserrat	4	1	0	3	3	11	3
Barbados	4	0	0	4	5	18	0

Group C

Oct 13 – Kingstown
Saint Vincent & Grenadines 1 (Sutherland 31)
French Guiana 4 (Nemouthe 7, Abelinti 11 pen, Baal 42, Haabo 81)

Oct 13 – Belmopan
Belize 0
Bermuda 1 (Crichlow 18)

Oct 16 – Fort-de-France
French Guiana 3 (Nemouthe 9 pen, Gaubert 44, Haabo 76)
Saint Vincent & Grenadines 2 (Stewart 16, 73)

Oct 16 – Devonshire Parish
Bermuda 1 (Crichlow 37)
Belize 1 (Reneau 75 pen)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
French Guiana	4	2	1	1	7	5	7
St Vincent & Gren	4	2	0	2	9	11	6
Bermuda	4	1	2	1	5	5	5
Belize	4	1	1	2	4	4	4

Group D

Oct 14 – Basseterre
Puerto Rico 1 (Antonetti 11)
Guyana 3 (Glasgow 60 pen, Benjamin 63, Moore 85)

Oct 14 – Nassau
Bahamas 1 (Julmis 62)
Antigua & Barbuda 4 (Stevens 3, 9, Bramble 43, Griffith 77 pen)

Oct 17 – Piggotts
Antigua & Barbuda 2 (Parker 54, Bramble 59)
Bahamas 2 (Wells 5, Johnson 82)

Oct 17 – Basseterre
Guyana 3 (Moria-Welsh 48, Moore 76, Glasgow 85)
Puerto Rico 1 (Diaz 41)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Guyana	4	4	0	0	14	5	12
Puerto Rico	4	2	0	2	13	7	6
Antigua & Barbuda	4	1	1	2	7	13	4
Bahamas	4	0	1	3	6	15	1

League C

Group A

Oct 12 – Rincon
Bonaire 2 (Ronde 10, Pourier 36)
Anguilla 0

Oct 16 – Basseterre
Saint Martin 8 (Segarel 17, 32 pen, 39, 47, Richardson 49, Raga 65, 70, 88)
Anguilla 0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Saint Martin	3	3	0	0	16	1	9
Bonaire	2	1	0	1	3	2	3
Anguilla	3	0	0	3	0	16	0

Group B

Oct 14 – Oranjestad
Aruba 3 (Ostiana 52, Luydens 61, Molina 86)
US Virgin Islands 1 (Henry 63)

Oct 17 – George Town
Cayman Islands 2 (Seymour 17, Reeves 57)
US Virgin Islands 1 (Joseph 84)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Aruba	2	2	0	0	5	2	6
Cayman Islands	3	1	1	1	5	5	4
US Virgin Islands	3	0	1	2	4	7	1

Group C

Oct 12 – Gros Oslet
Dominica 1 (Thomas 82)
British Virgin Islands 1 (Chalwell 29)

Oct 16 – Providenciales
Turks & Caicos 2 (Forbes 26 pen, 76)
British Virgin Islands 2 (Bertie 3, Smith 90+5)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
British Virgin Islands	3	1	2	0	6	4	5
Dominica	2	1	1	0	4	1	4
Turks & Caicos	3	0	1	2	3	8	1

AFCON 2023

Oct 17 – Agadir
Morocco 3 (Harit 45+2, El Kaabi 59 pen, Adli 89)
Liberia 0
Rescheduled Group K qualifier following earthquake

Group Stage Draw

Group A
Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Eq. Guinea, Guinea-Bissau

Group B
Egypt, Ghana, Cape Verde, Mozambique

Group C
Senegal, Cameroon, Guinea, Gambia

Group D
Algeria, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Angola

Group E
Tunisia, Mali, South Africa, Namibia

Group F
Morocco, DR Congo, Zambia, Tanzania
**Tournament preview to follow in January's issue*

ASIAN CUP 2023

Group Stage Draw

Group A
Qatar, China, Tajikistan, Lebanon

Group B
Australia, Uzbekistan, Syria, India

Group C
Iran, United Arab Emirates, Hong Kong, Palestine

Group D
Japan, Indonesia, Iraq, Vietnam

Group E
South Korea, Malaysia, Jordan, Bahrain

Group F
Saudi Arabia, Thailand, Kyrgyzstan, Oman
**Tournament preview to follow in January's issue*

FRIENDLIES

Sep 30 – Gaborone
Botswana 1 (Maswena 68)
Zimbabwe 1 (Chirinda 63)
Botswana win 4-3 on penalties

Oct 8 – Noumea
Papua New Guinea 1 (Gunemba 51)
Solomon Islands 3 (Lea'i 80, 86, 90+3)

Oct 8 – Noumea
New Caledonia 4 (L. Bako 37, Read 45, Waia 57, 86)
Vanuatu 0

Oct 10 – Dalian
China 2 (Wang Qiuming 56, Wu Lei 90+8)
Vietnam 0

Oct 11 – Wrexham
Wales 4 (B. Davies 22, Moore 26, 45, Broadhead 35)
Gibraltar 0

Oct 11 – Kone
Solomon Islands 1 (Leslie 45)
Vanuatu 0

Oct 11 – Kone
Papua New Guinea 1 (Semmy 45+2)
New Caledonia 3 (Neoere 42, Welepane 52 pen, Xowi 71)

Oct 12 – Tbilisi
Georgia 8 (Davitashvili 9, 43, Lochoshvili 12, Mikautadze 24, 37, 41, 56 pen, Kvaratskhelia 66)
Thailand 0

Oct 12 – Muharraq
Bahrain 2 (Abdulwahab 59, Duaij 86)
Kyrgyzstan 0

Oct 12 – Al Ain
Egypt 1 (Fathy 90+4)
Zambia 0

Oct 12 – Moscow
Russia 1 (Chalov 40)
Cameroon 0

Oct 12 – Podgorica
Montenegro 3 (Kuc 16, 19, Osmajic 69)
Lebanon 2 (Darwich 65, Tnesh 80)

Oct 12 – Solna
Sweden 3 (Karlsson 9, 74, Lagerbielke 18)
Moldova 1 (Nicolaescu 39)

Oct 12 – Constantine
Algeria 5 (Amoura 12, Aouar 39, 41, Zerrouki 61, Slimani 89 pen)
Cape Verde 1 (Bebe 55)

Oct 12 – Dubai
United Arab Emirates 1 (Al Zaabi 27)
Kuwait 0

Oct 13 – Niigata
Japan 4 (Tanaka 2, 49, Davies 39 og, Nakamura 42)
Canada 1 (Hoilett 89)

Oct 13 – Seoul
South Korea 4 (Lee Kang-in 55, 57, Meriah 66 og, Hwang Ui-jo 90+1)
Tunisia 0

Oct 13 – Amman
Qatar 0
Iraq 0
Qatar win 6-5 on penalties

Oct 13 – Kuala Lumpur
Malaysia 4 (Cools 7, Hanapi 20 pen, Halim 42, Corbin-Ong 61)
India 2 (Naorem 13, Chhetri 51)

Oct 13 – Johannesburg
South Africa 0
Eswatini 0

Oct 13 – Portimao
Saudi Arabia 2 (Al Faraj 60, Kanno 90+10)
Nigeria 2 (Al Amri 73 og, Iheanacho 81)

Oct 13 – Amman
Jordan 1 (Al Naimat 74)
Iran 3 (Azmoun 6, Taremi 28, Mohammadi 90+4)

Oct 13 – Murcia
New Zealand 1 (Wood 90+1 pen)
DR Congo 1 (Bakambu 46)

Oct 13 – Wembley
England 1 (Watkins 57)
Australia 0

Oct 13 – Dalian
Vietnam 0
Uzbekistan 2 (Urunov 27, Aliqulov 66)

Oct 13 – Malabo
Equatorial Guinea 0
Burkina Faso 0

Oct 13 – Albufeira
Angola 1 (Gelson 85)
Mozambique 1 (Bangal 71)

Oct 13 – Setubal
Guinea 1 (Guilavogui 72)
Guinea-Bissau 0

Oct 13 – Bamako
Mali 1 (Sinayoko 73 pen)
Uganda 0

Oct 14 – Noumea
Papua New Guinea 0
Vanuatu 1 (Mansale 45+1)

Oct 14 – Noumea
Solomon Islands 1 (Lea'i 76)
New Caledonia 0

Oct 14 – Abidjan
Ivory Coast 1 (Haller 45+3)
Morocco 1 (El Kaabi 81)

Oct 14 – East Hartford
United States 1 (Pulisic 27)
Germany 3 (Gundogan 39, Fullkrug 58, Musiala 61)

Oct 14 – Charlotte
Mexico 2 (Lozano 57, Antuna 72)
Ghana 0

Oct 14 – Mohammedia
Mauritania 2 (Anne 28, Tanjy 71)
Madagascar 1 (Anicet 90+5)

Oct 14 – Berrechid
Niger 3 (Amoustapha 9, Wonkoye 26 pen, Goumey 74)
Somalia 0

Oct 14 – Mohammedia
Sierra Leone 1 (Turay 32)
Benin 1 (Hountondji 90+9)

Oct 15 – Taif
Sudan 1 (Gahdia 2)
Tanzania 1 (Msuva 67)

Oct 15 – Muharraq
Kyrgyzstan 0
Philippines 1 (Menzi 71)

Oct 16 – Lobatse
Botswana 2 (Orebonye 26, Maswena 80)
Eswatini 1 (Myeni 55)

Oct 16 – Dalian
China 1 (Wei Shihao 41)
Uzbekistan 2 (Shukurov 78, Iskanderov 86)

Oct 16 – Albufeira
Mozambique 2 (Catamo 6, Bangal 55)
Nigeria 3 (Moffi 19, Onyeka 30, Simon 45+3 pen)

Oct 16 – Al Ain
Egypt 1 (Fathy 62)
Algeria 1 (Slimani 90+3)

Oct 16 – Antalya
Kenya 2 (Akuma 16, Juma 36)
Russia 2 (Sobolev 8, Oblyakov 89)

Oct 16 – Lens
Senegal 1 (Mane 35 pen)
Cameroon 0

Oct 17 – Kobe
Japan 2 (Furuhashi 43, J. Ito 69)
Tunisia 0

Oct 17 – Suwon
South Korea 6 (Kim Min-jae 5, Hwang Hee-chan 27, Vo Minh Trong 50 og, Son Heung-min 61, Lee Kang-in 70, Jeong Woo-yeong 86)
Vietnam 0

Oct 17 – Portimao
Saudi Arabia 1 (S. Al Dawsari 58)
Mali 3 (M. Doumbia 14, H. Traore 42, Sinayoko 71)

Oct 17 – Sharjah
Zambia 3 (Daka 6 pen, 69, Sakala 63)
Uganda 0

Oct 17 – Strumica
North Macedonia 3 (Trajkovski 43, M. Ristovski 59, Daci 88)
Armenia 1 (Spertsyan 90+4)

Oct 17 – Tallinn
Estonia 1 (Anier 71)
Thailand 1 (Jakkaphan 76)

Oct 17 – Tirana
Albania 2 (Laci 41, Muci 81)
Bulgaria 0

Oct 17 – Amman
Qatar 0
Iran 4 (Kanaani 69, 79, Jahanbakhsh 73, Azmoun 75)

Oct 17 – London
Australia 2 (Souttar 13, Irvine 76)
New Zealand 0

Oct 17 – Lille
France 4 (Pavard 16, 24, Mbappe 41 pen, Coman 70)
Scotland 1 (Gilmour 11)

Oct 17 – Abidjan
Ivory Coast 1 (Haller 66)
South Africa 1 (Zwane 9)

Oct 17 – Dubai
UAE 2 (Caio Canedo 26, Adil 90+4)
Lebanon 1 (Darwich 34)

Oct 17 – Philadelphia
Mexico 2 (Antuna 37, Sanchez 47)
Germany 2 (Rudiger 25, Fullkrug 51)

Oct 17 – Nashville
USA 4 (Reyna 10, 39, Pulisic 19 pen, Balogun 22)
Ghana 0

Oct 17 – Dubai
Syria 1 (Al Somah 17)
Kuwait 2 (Al Khaldi 43, 45+2)

Oct 17 – Amman
Iraq 2 (Hussein 70, Al Hamadi 75)
Jordan 2 (Al Naimat 31, 79)
Iraq win 5-3 on penalties

Oct 17 – Setubal
Angola 0
DR Congo 0

Oct 17 – Muharraq
Bahrain 1 (Al Khatal 16)
Philippines 0

Oct 17 – Kuala Lumpur
Malaysia 0
Tajikistan 2 (Soirov 44, Samiev 88)

Oct 17 – Fos-sur-Mer
Cape Verde 1 (Rocha Santos 2)
Comoros 2 (Younes 48, Mahamoud 86 pen)

Oct 17 – Casablanca
Mauritania 1 (Ba 65)
Burkina Faso 2 (Konate 18, Aziz Ki 47)

Oct 17 – Algarve
Guinea 1 (Guirassy 35)
Gabon 1 (Boupendza 62 pen)

Oct 17 – Mohammedia
Madagascar 2 (Tsiry Razafindrasata 21, Yves Razafindrakoto 51)
Benin 1 (Hountonji 3)

Oct 17 – Berrechid
Somalia 0
Sierra Leone 2 (Buya Turay 26 pen, 59)

Club football EUROPE

2023-24 UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group A

Oct 24 – Istanbul
Galatasaray (Tur) 1 (Icardi 30 pen)
Bayern Munich (Ger) 3 (Coman 8, Kane 73, Musiala 79)

Oct 24 – Manchester
Manchester United (Eng) 1 (Maguire 72)
Copenhagen (Den) 0

Nov 8 – Munich
Bayern Munich (Ger) 2 (Kane 80, 86)
Galatasaray (Tur) 1 (Bakambu 90+3)

Nov 8 – Copenhagen
Copenhagen (Den) 4 (Elyounoussi 45, Goncalves 45+9 pen, Lerager 83, Bardghji 87)
Manchester United (Eng) 3 (Hojlund 3, 28, Fernandes 69 pen)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bayern Munich	4	4	0	0	11	6	12
Copenhagen	4	1	1	2	7	8	4
Galatasaray	4	1	1	2	7	9	4
Man United	4	1	0	3	9	11	3

Group B

Oct 24 – Seville
Sevilla (Spa) 1 (Gudelj 58)
Arsenal (Eng) 2 (Martinelli 45+4, G. Jesus 53)

Oct 24 – Lens
Lens (Fra) 1 (Wahi 65)
PSV (Ned) 1 (Bakayoko 54)

Nov 8 – London
Arsenal (Eng) 2 (Trossard 29, Saka 64)
Sevilla (Spa) 0

Nov 8 – Eindhoven
PSV (Ned) 1 (De Jong 12)
Lens (Fra) 0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Arsenal	4	3	0	1	9	3	9
PSV	4	1	2	1	4	7	5
Lens	4	1	2	1	4	4	5
Sevilla	4	0	2	2	4	7	2

Group C

Oct 24 – Braga
Braga (Por) 1 (Djalo 63)
Real Madrid (Spa) 2 (Rodrygo 16, Bellingham 61)

Oct 24 – Berlin
Union Berlin (Ger) 0
Napoli (Ita) 1 (Raspadori 65)

Nov 8 – Naples
Napoli (Ita) 1 (Politano 39)
Union Berlin (Ger) 1 (Fofana 52)

Nov 8 – Madrid
Real Madrid (Spa) 3 (Brahim 27, Vinicius Jr 58, Rodrygo 61)
Braga (Por) 0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Real Madrid	4	4	0	0	9	3	12
Napoli	4	2	1	1	6	5	7
Braga	4	1	0	3	5	9	3
Union Berlin	4	0	1	3	3	6	1

Group D

Oct 24 – Milan
Inter (Ita) 2 (Sanchez 19, Calhanoglu 64 pen)
Red Bull Salzburg (Aut) 1 (Gloukh 57)

Oct 24 – Lisbon
Benfica (Por) 0
Real Sociedad (Spa) 1 (Mendez 63)

Nov 8 – San Sebastian
Real Sociedad (Spa) 3 (Merino 6, Oyarzabal 11, Barrenetxea 21)
Benfica (Por) 1 (R. Silva 49)

Nov 8 – Salzburg
Red Bull Salzburg (Aut) 0
Internazionale (Ita) 1 (Martinez 85 pen)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Real Sociedad	4	3	1	0	7	2	10
Inter	4	3	1	0	5	2	10
RB Salzburg	4	1	0	3	3	5	3
Benfica	4	0	0	4	1	7	0

Group E

Oct 25 – Rotterdam
Feyenoord (Ned) 3 (Gimenez 31, 74, Zerrouki 45+2)
Lazio (Ita) 1 (Pedro 83 pen)

Oct 25 – Glasgow
Celtic (Sco) 2 (Furuhashi 4, Palma 28)
Atl Madrid (Spa) 2 (Griezmann 25, Morata 53)

Nov 7 – Madrid
Atletico Madrid (Spa) 6 (Griezmann 6, 60, Morata 45+2, 76, Lino 66, Saul 84)
Celtic (Sco) 0

Nov 7 – Rome
Lazio (Ita) 1 (Immobile 45+1)
Feyenoord (Ned) 0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Atl Madrid	4	2	2	0	12	5	8
Lazio	4	2	1	1	5	5	7
Feyenoord	4	2	0	2	7	5	6
Celtic	4	0	1	3	3	12	1

Group F

Oct 25 – Paris
Paris Saint-Germain (Fra) 3 (Mbappe 32, Kolo-Muani 53, Lee Kang-in 89)
Milan (Ita) 0

Oct 25 – Newcastle
Newcastle United (Eng) 0
Borussia Dortmund (Ger) 1 (Nmecha 45)

Nov 7 – Dortmund
B. Dortmund (Ger) 2 (Fullkrug 26, Brandt 79)
Newcastle United (Eng) 0

Nov 7 – Milan
Milan (Ita) 2 (Leao 12, Giroud 50)
Paris Saint-Germain (Fra) 1 (Skriniar 9)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
B. Dortmund	4	2	1	1	3	2	7
PSG	4	2	0	2	7	6	6
Milan	4	1	2	1	2	4	5
Newcastle Utd	4	1	1	2	4	4	4

World Service

Group G

Oct 25 – Leipzig
RB Leipzig (Ger) 3 (Raum 12, Simons 59, Olmo 84)
Red Star Belgrade (Srb) 1 (Stamenic 70)

Oct 25 – Bern
Young Boys (Sui) 1 (Elia 52)
Man City (Eng) 3 (Akanji 48, Haaland 67 pen, 86)

Nov 7 – Manchester
Man City (Eng) 3 (Haaland 23 pen, 51, Foden 45+1)
Young Boys (Sui) 0

Nov 7 – Belgrade
Red Star Belgrade (Srb) 1 (Henrichs 81 og)
RB Leipzig (Ger) 2 (Simons 8, Openda 77)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Man City	4	4	0	0	12	3	12
RB Leipzig	4	3	0	1	9	6	9
Red Star	4	0	1	3	5	10	1
Young Boys	4	0	1	3	4	11	1

Group H

Oct 25 – Barcelona
Barcelona (Spa) 2 (Torres 28, Lopez 36)
Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr) 1 (Sudakov 62)

Oct 25 – Antwerp
Antwerp (Bel) 1 (Yusuf 37)
Porto (Por) 4 (Evanilson 46, 69, 84, Eustaquio 54)

Nov 7 – Hamburg
Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr) 1 (Sikan 40)
Barcelona (Spa) 0

Nov 7 – Porto
Porto (Por) 2 (Evanilson 32 pen, Pepe 90+1)
Antwerp (Bel) 0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Barcelona	4	3	0	1	8	2	9
Porto	4	3	0	1	9	3	9
Shakhtar	4	2	0	2	6	7	6
Antwerp	4	0	0	4	3	14	0

2023-24 UEFA EUROPA LEAGUE

Group A

Oct 26 – Piraeus
Olympiakos (Gre) 2 (Fortounis 33, Rodinei 45+1)
West Ham United (Eng) 1 (Paqueta 87)

Oct 26 – Backa Topola
TSC Backa Topola (Srb) 1 (Petrovic 13)
Freiburg (Ger) 3 (Grifo 49 pen, 59, 73)

Nov 9 – Freiburg
Freiburg (Ger) 5 (Rohl 24, Eggestein 56, Weisshaupt 69, Adamu 80, Doan 90+2)
TSC Backa Topola (Srb) 0

Nov 9 – London
West Ham United (Eng) 1 (Paqueta 73)
Olympiakos (Gre) 0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
West Ham	4	3	0	1	7	4	9
Freiburg	4	3	0	1	12	5	9
Olympiakos	4	1	1	2	6	7	4
TSC	4	0	1	3	4	13	1

Group B

Oct 26 – Marseille
Marseille (Fra) 3 (Vitinha 27, Harit 60 pen, Veretout 69 pen)
AEK Athens (Gre) 1 (Pineda 53)

Oct 26 – Brighton
Brighton (Eng) 2 (Joao Pedro 42, Fati 53)
Ajax (Ned) 0

Nov 9 – Amsterdam
Ajax (Ned) 0
Brighton (Eng) 2 (Fati 15, Adingra 53)

Nov 9 – Athens
AEK Athens (Gre) 0
Marseille (Fra) 2 (Mbemba 25, Sarr 90+3)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Marseille	4	2	2	0	10	6	8
Brighton	4	2	1	1	8	5	7
AEK Athens	4	1	1	2	5	8	4
Ajax	4	0	2	2	4	8	2

Group C

Oct 26 – Prague
Sparta Prague (Cze) 0
Rangers (Sco) 0

Oct 26 – Limassol
Aris Limassol (Cyp) 0
Real Betis (Spa) 1 (Perez 75)

Nov 9 – Seville
Real Betis (Spa) 4 (Iglesias 34, Ruibal 64, Roca 79, Ezzalzouli 90+4)
Aris Limassol (Cyp) 1 (Kokorin 84)

Nov 9 – Glasgow
Rangers (Sco) 2 (Danilo 11, Cantwell 20)
Sparta Prague (Cze) 1 (Haraslin 77)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Real Betis	4	3	0	1	7	3	9
Rangers	4	2	1	1	4	3	7
Sparta Prague	4	1	1	2	5	6	4
Aris Limassol	4	1	0	3	5	9	3

Group D

Oct 26 – Graz
Sturm Graz (Aut) 2 (Prass 13, Wlodarczyk 80 pen)
Atalanta (Ita) 2 (Muriel 34, 45+7 pen)

Oct 26 – Sosnowiec
Rakow Czestochowa (Pol) 1 (Piasecki 79)
Sporting (Por) 1 (Coates 14)

Nov 9 – Bergamo
Atalanta (Ita) 1 (Djimsiti 50)
Sturm Graz (Aut) 0

Nov 9 – Lisbon
Sporting (Por) 2 (Goncalves 14 pen, 52 pen)
Rakow Czestochowa (Pol) 1 (Rundic 70)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Atalanta	4	3	1	0	7	3	10
Sporting	4	2	1	1	6	5	7
Sturm Graz	4	1	1	2	4	5	4
Rakow	4	0	1	3	2	6	1

Group E

Oct 26 – Brussels
Union SG (Bel) 2 (Puertas 84 pen, Burgess 90+4)
LASK (Aut) 1 (Usor 24)

Oct 26 – Liverpool
Liverpool (Eng) 5 (Jota 9, Endo 30, Nunez 34, Gravenberch 65, Salah 90+3)
Toulouse (Fra) 1 (Dallinga 16)

Nov 9 – Linz
LASK (Aut) 3 (Horvath 25 pen, Talovyerov 45+4, Zulj 77)
Union Saint-Gilloise (Bel) 0

Nov 9 – Toulouse
Toulouse (Fra) 3 (Donnum 36, Dallinga 58, Magri 76)
Liverpool (Eng) 2 (Casseres 74 og, Jota 89)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Liverpool	4	3	0	1	12	5	9
Toulouse	4	2	1	1	6	8	7
Union SG	4	1	1	2	3	7	4
LASK	4	1	0	3	5	6	3

Group F

Oct 26 – Athens
Panathinaikos (Gre) 1 (Ioannidis 61 pen)
Rennes (Fra) 2 (Gouiri 7, Kalimuendo 49)

Nov 9 – Rennes
Rennes (Fra) 3 (Rieder 9, Salah 65, Blas 70 pen)
Panathinaikos (Gre) 1 (Ioannidis 34 pen)

Nov 9 – Larnaca
Maccabi Haifa (Isr) 1 (Seck 30)
Villarreal (Spa) 2 (Baena 82, Sorloth 86)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Rennes	4	3	0	1	8	3	9
Villarreal	3	2	0	1	3	3	6
Panathinaikos	4	1	1	2	4	5	4
Maccabi Haifa	3	0	1	2	1	5	1

Group G

Oct 26 – Rome
Roma (Ita) 2 (Bove 1, Lukaku 17)
Slavia Prague (Cze) 0

Oct 26 – Tiraspol
Sheriff Tiraspol (Mda) 1 (Ankeye 80)
Servette (Sui) 1 (Crivelli 41)

Nov 9 – Geneva
Servette (Sui) 2 (Rouiller 84, Bedia 90+3 pen)
Sheriff Tiraspol (Mda) 1 (Severin 12 og)

Nov 9 – Prague
Slavia Prague (Cze) 2 (Jurecka 50 Masopust 74)
Roma (Ita) 0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Slavia Prague	4	3	0	1	10	2	9
Roma	4	3	0	1	8	3	9
Servette	4	1	1	2	3	8	4
Sheriff Tiraspol	4	0	1	3	3	11	1

Group H

Oct 26 – Molde
Molde (Nor) 5 (Gulbrandsen 6, Eikrem 27, 55, Breivik 30, Bjornbak 90+3)
BK Hacken (Swe) 1 (Sonko 21)

Oct 26 – Leverkusen
Bayer Leverkusen (Ger) 5 (Wirtz 6, Grimaldo 29, 55, Boniface 36, Tapsoba 57)
Qarabag (Aze) 1 (Bayramov 16 pen)

Nov 9 – Baku
Qarabag (Aze) 0
Bayer Leverkusen (Ger) 1 (Boniface 90+4 pen)

Nov 9 – Gothenburg
BK Hacken (Swe) 1 (Hrstic 65)
Molde (Nor) 3 (Gulbrandsen 16, Eriksen 24, 86)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
B. Leverkusen	4	4	0	0	12	2	12
Qarabag	4	2	0	2	3	6	6
Molde	4	2	0	2	9	5	6
BK Hacken	4	0	0	4	2	13	0

2023-24 UEFA CONFERENCE LEAGUE

Group A

Oct 26 – Lille
Lille (Fra) 2 (Yazici 68, Cabella 82)
Slovan Bratislava (Svk) 1 (Cavric 23)

Oct 26 – Torshavn
Ki Klaksvik (Fro) 3 (Joensen 30, Klettskard 44, J. Andreasen 54)
Olimpija Ljubljana (Svn) 0

Nov 9 – Bratislava
Slovan Bratislava (Svk) 1 (Cavric 81)
Lille (Fra) 1 (Gomes 53)

Nov 9 – Ljubljana
Olimpija Ljubljana (Svn) 2 (Sualehe 84, Nukic 88)
Ki Klaksvik (Fro) 0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lille	4	2	2	0	5	2	8
Slovan	4	2	1	1	5	4	7
KI	4	1	1	2	4	4	4
Olimpija	4	1	0	3	2	6	3

Group B

Oct 26 – Gent
Gent (Bel) 5 (Gandelman 10, Cuypers 15, 19, Tissoudali 43, Orban 69)
Breidablik (Isl) 0

Nov 9 – Reykjavik
Breidablik (Isl) 2 (Svanthorsson 16, 18)
Gent (Bel) 3 (Orban 6, 54 pen, 69)

Nov 9 – Lublin
Zorya Luhansk (Ukr) 1 (Alefirenko 74)
Maccabi Tel Aviv (Isr) 3 (Luckassen 7, Peretz 26, 43)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Gent	4	3	1	0	11	3	10
Maccabi Tel Aviv	4	2	0	1	6	5	6
Zorya Luhansk	4	1	1	1	3	4	4
Breidablik	4	0	0	4	4	12	0

Group C

Oct 26 – Pristina
Ballkani (Kos) 1 (Kuc 8)
Astana (Kaz) 2 (Hovhannisyan 7, Beysebekov 23)

Oct 26 – Zagreb
Dinamo Zagreb (Cro) 0
Viktoria Plzen (Cze) 1 (Chory 69 pen)

Nov 9 – Astana
Astana (Kaz) 0
Ballkani (Kos) 0

Nov 9 – Plzen
Viktoria Plzen (Cze) 1 (Chory 35 pen)
Dinamo Zagreb (Cro) 0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Viktoria Plzen	4	4	0	0	5	1	12
Astana	4	1	1	2	4	8	4
Ballkani	4	1	1	2	3	3	4
Dinamo Zagreb	4	1	0	3	5	5	3

Group D

Oct 26 – Zurich
Lugano (Sui) 1 (Vladi 74)
Club Brugge (Bel) 3 (Balanta 15, Skov Olsen 50, Vanaken 87)

Oct 26 – Bodo
Bode/Glimt (Nor) 3 (Gronbaek 29, Moumbagna 58, Saltnes 87)
Besiktas (Tur) 1 (Moe 90+1 og)

Nov 9 – Istanbul
Besiktas (Tur) 1 (Bingol 64)
Bode/Glimt (Nor) 2 (Moumbagna 38, 49)

Nov 9 – Brugge
Club Brugge (Bel) 2 (Thiago 62 pen, Vanaken 90+6)
Lugano (Sui) 0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Club Brugge	4	3	1	0	7	2	10
Bodo/Glimt	4	2	1	1	5	3	7
Lugano	4	1	1	2	4	7	4
Besiktas	4	0	1	3	5	9	1

Group E

Oct 26 – Alkmaar
AZ (Ned) 1 (Sadiq 65)
Aston Villa (Eng) 4 (Bailey 13, Tielemans 23, Watkins 51, McGinn 56)

Oct 26 – Mostar
Zrinjski Mostar (Bih) 1 (Bilbija 30)
Legia Warsaw (Pol) 2 (Jakovljevic 32 og, Kramer 62)

Nov 9 – Istanbul
Legia Warsaw (Pol) 2 (Augustyniak 14, Josue 30 pen)
Zrinjski Mostar (Bih) 0

Nov 9 – Birmingham
Aston Villa (Eng) 2 (Diego Carlos 61, Watkins 81)
AZ (Ned) 1 (Pavlidis 52)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Legia Warsaw	4	3	0	1	7	4	9
Aston Villa	4	3	0	1	9	5	9
Zrinjski Mostar	4	1	0	3	5	8	3
AZ	4	1	0	3	6	10	3

Group F

Oct 26 – Genk
Genk (Bel) 0
Ferencvaros (Hun) 0

Oct 26 – Florence
Fiorentina (Ita) 6 (Beltran 6, 10, Ikone 29, Sottil 65, Martinez Quarta 73, Lopez 83)
Cukaricki (Srb) 0

Nov 9 – Budapest
Ferencvaros (Hun) 1 (Pesic 48)
Genk (Bel) 1 (Munoz 62)

Nov 9 – Leskovac
Cukaricki (Srb) 0
Fiorentina (Ita) 1 (Nzola 8 pen)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Fiorentina	4	2	2	0	11	4	8
Ferencvaros	4	1	3	0	6	4	6
Genk	4	1	3	0	5	3	6
Cukaricki	4	0	0	4	1	12	0

Group G

Oct 26 – Frankfurt
Eintracht Frankfurt (Ger) 6 (Dina Ebimbe 12 pen, 89, Koch 27, Marmoush 31, Tuta 45+3, Skhiri 55)
HJK (Fin) 0

Oct 26 – Aberdeen
Aberdeen (Sco) 2 (Miovski 50, Polvara 58)
PAOK (Gre) 3 (Despodov 73, Vieirinha 84, Schwab 90+6 pen)

Nov 9 – Thessaloniki
PAOK (Gre) 2 (Taison 23, Samatta 67)
Aberdeen (Sco) 2 (Duk 14, McGrath 70)

Nov 9 – Helsinki
HJK (Fin) 0
Eintracht Frankfurt (Ger) 1 (Chaibi 31)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
PAOK	4	3	1	0	10	7	10
E. Frankfurt	4	3	0	1	10	3	9
Aberdeen	4	0	2	2	6	8	2
HJK	4	0	1	3	3	11	1

Group H

Oct 26 – Istanbul
Fenerbahce (Tur) 3 (Batshuayi 42, Zajc 52, 90+3)
Ludogorets (Bul) 1 (Becao 65 og)

Oct 26 – Trnava
Spartak Trnava (Svk) 0
Nordsjaelland (Den) 2 (Jensen-Abbew 36, Rasmussen 48)

Nov 9 – Farum
Nordsjaelland (Den) 1 (Ingvartsen 32 pen)
Spartak Trnava (Svk) 1 (Duris 61)

Nov 9 – Razgrad
Ludogorets (Bul) 2 (Piotrowski 18, Rwan 90+2)
Fenerbahce (Tur) 0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Fenerbahce	4	3	0	1	8	5	9
Nordsjaelland	4	2	1	1	11	5	7
Ludogorets	4	2	0	2	8	10	6
Spartak Trnava	4	0	1	3	2	9	1

SOUTH AMERICA

2023 COPA LIBERTADORES

Final

Nov 4 – Rio de Janeiro
Boca Juniors (Arg) 1 (Advincula 72)
Fluminense (Bra) 2 (Cano 36, John Kennedy 99)
After Extra-Time
Boca Juniors: Romero – Advincula, Figal (Valdez 113), Valentini, Fabra; Medina (Taborda 106), Pol Fernandez, E. Fernandez (Sarrachi 106), Barco (Langoni 78); Cavani (Benedetto 78), Merentiel (Janson 91).
Sent off: Fabra 105+7.
Fluminense: Fabio – Samuel Xavier (Guga 85), Nino, Felipe Melo (Marlon 52), Marcelo (Barboso 80); Martinelli (Lima 80), Andre; Arias, Ganso (John Kennedy 80), Keno (Braz 103); Cano.
Sent off: John Kennedy 101.

2023 COPA SUDAMERICANA

Final

Oct 28 – Maldonado
Fortaleza (Bra) 1 (Lucero 48)
LDU (Ecu) 1 (Alzugaray 56)
After Extra-Time. LDU win 4-3 on penalties
Fortaleza: Ricardo – Tinga, Britez, Titi, Pacheco; Welison (Augusto 84), Caio Alexandre (Sasha 105); Marinho (Machuca 74), Pochettino (Galhardo 83), Guilherme (Pikachu 65); Lucero (Romero 100).
LDU: Dominguez – Quintero, Ade, Rodriguez, Quinonez (Ramirez 97); Martinez, Piovi; Ibarra (Alzugaray 40), Gonzalez (Alvarado 64), Julio; Guerrero.

ASIA

2023-24 AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group A

Oct 24 – Al Ain
Al Ain (UAE) 4 (Autonne 36, Kaku 45+3, 67, Rahimi 90)
Al Fayha (KSA) 1 (Al Harthi 84)

Oct 24 – Tashkent
Pakhtakor (Uzb) 3 (Erkinov 23, Turgunboev 27, 59)
Ahal (Tkm) 0

Nov 7 – Riyadh
Al Fayha (KSA) 2 (Nwakaeme 53, Al Qaydhi 90+6)
Al Ain (UAE) 3 (Laba 29, 40, Rahimi 64)

Nov 7 – Ashgabat
Ahal (Tkm) 1 (Abdyrahmanow 81)
Pakhtakor (Uzb) 1 (Erkinov 90+5)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Ain	4	4	0	0	14	5	12
Pakhtakor	4	1	1	2	4	6	4
Ahal	4	1	1	2	4	8	4
Al Fayha	4	1	0	3	5	8	3

Group B

Oct 23 – Sharjah
Sharjah (UAE) 1 (Caio Lucas 45+5)
Nasaf Qarsi (Uzb) 0

Oct 23 – Doha
Al Sadd (Qat) 6 (Bounedjah 8, 50, 63, Plata 51, Meshaal 52, Abdurisag 83)
Al Faisaly (Jor) 0

Nov 6 – Qarshi
Nasaf Qarsi (Uzb) 1 (Lima 81)
Sharjah (UAE) 1 (Marega 16)

Nov 6 – Amman
Al Faisaly (Jor) 2 (Al Rushadi 56, Al Haj 85)
Al Sadd (Qat) 0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sharjah	4	2	2	0	3	1	8
Nasaf Qarshi	4	2	1	1	5	3	7
Al Sadd	4	1	1	2	7	5	4
Al Faisaly	4	1	0	3	2	8	3

Group C

Oct 23 – Olmaliq
AGMK (Uzb) 1 (Mirakhmadov 36)
Sepahan (Irn) 3 (Rezaeian 32, 49, Asadi 59)

Oct 23 – Jeddah
Al Ittihad (KSA) 1 (Hamdallah 90+4)
Al Quwa Al Jawiya (Irq) 0

Nov 6 – Tehran
Sepahan (Irn) 9 (Ahmadzadeh 8, Asadi 59, Hosseinnejad 60, 90+3, Ghorbani 62, Rezaeian 71, Alekasir 79, 87, Moghanlou 82)
AGMK (Uzb) 0

Nov 6 – Erbil
Al Quwa Al Jawiya (Irq) 2 (Jasim 44, Abdul Raheem 52)
Al Ittihad (KSA) 0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Ittihad	4	3	0	1	7	2	9
Sepahan	4	2	1	1	14	6	7
Al Quwa Al Jawiya	4	2	1	1	6	4	7
AGMK	4	0	0	4	2	17	0

Group D

Oct 23 – Namangan
Navbahor (Uzb) 2 (Urunov 74, Abdi 90+7 og)
Nassaji Mazandaran (Irn) 1 (Azadi 44)

Oct 23 – Riyadh
Al Hilal (KSA) 6 (Mitrovic 5, 67, 80, Milinkovic-Savic 75, Al Breik 82, Al Malki 90+5)
Mumbai City (Ind) 0

Nov 6 – Tehran
Nassaji Mazandaran (Irn) 1 (Azadi 68)
Navbahor (Uzb) 3 (Golban 7, Urunov 21, 48)

Nov 6 – Navi Mumbai
Mumbai City (Ind) 0
Al Hilal (KSA) 2 (Michael 62, Mitrovic 85)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Hilal	4	3	1	0	12	1	10
Navbahor	4	3	1	0	9	3	10
Nassaji Mazandaran	4	1	0	3	4	8	3
Mumbai City	4	0	0	4	0	13	0

Group E

Oct 24 – Riyadh
Al Nassr (KSA) 4 (Talisca 25, Mane 56, Ronaldo 61, 81)
Al Duhail (Qat) 3 (Mohammad 63, Ali 67, Olunga 85)

Oct 24 – Tehran
Persepolis (Irn) 2 (Sadeghi 44, 71)
Istiklol (Tjk) 0

Nov 7 – Doha
Al Duhail (Qat) 2 (Coutinho 8, 80 pen)
Al Nassr (KSA) 3 (Talisca 27, 37, 65)

Nov 7 – Dushanbe
Istiklol (Tjk) 1 (Sebai 74)
Persepolis (Irn) 1 (Torabi 29)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Nassr	4	4	0	0	12	6	12
Persepolis	4	2	1	1	4	3	7
Istiklol	4	0	2	2	2	6	2
Al Duhail	4	0	1	3	5	8	1

Group F

Oct 25 – Jeonju
Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors (Kor) 3 (Jun 5, Tan 33 og, Moon Seon-min 57)
Lion City Sailors (Sgp) 0

Oct 25 – Hong Kong
Kitchee (Hkg) 1 (Jantscher 7)
Bangkok Utd (Tha) 2 (Rungrath 45+4, Willen 52)

Nov 8 – Singapore
Lion City Sailors (Sgp) 2 (Zivkovic 23, 55)
Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors (Kor) 0

Nov 8 – Rangsit
Bangkok United (Tha) 1 (Willen 27)
Kitchee (Hkg) 1 (Jantscher 70)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bangkok Utd	4	3	1	0	8	5	10
Jeonbuk HM	4	2	0	2	7	6	6
Lion City Sailors	4	2	0	2	5	6	6
Kitchee	4	0	1	3	4	7	1

Group G

Oct 25 – Incheon
Incheon United (Kor) 0
Shandong Taishan (Chn) 2 (Crysan 58, Fellaini 87)

Oct 25 – Yokohama
Yokohama F. Marinos (Jpn) 3 (Mizunuma 35, Sugimoto 72, Anderson Lopes 90+5)
Kaya–Iloilo (Phi) 0

Nov 7 – Jinan
Shandong Taishan (Chn) 3 (Li Yuanyi 54, Kweon Han-jin 65 og, Cryzan 75)
Incheon United (Kor) 1 (Kim Do-hyuk 90+2)

Nov 7 – Manila
Kaya–Iloilo (Phi) 1 (Horikoshi 39)
Yokohama F. Marinos (Jpn) 2 (Murakami 26, Yan Matheus 87)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Yokohama FM	4	3	0	1	8	5	9
Shandong Taishan	4	3	0	1	8	3	9
Incheon United	4	2	0	2	9	7	6
Kaya-Iloilo	4	0	0	4	2	12	0

Group H

Oct 25 – Huzhou
Zhejiang (Chn) 2 (Possignolo 9, Mushekwi 58)
Ventforet Kofu (Jpn) 0

Oct 25 – Buriram
Buriram United (Tha) 0
Melbourne City (Aus) 2 (Lopane 22, Maclaren 41)

Nov 8 – Tokyo
Ventforet Kofu (Jpn) 4 (Utaka 17, Getulio 45+2, Masahiro 58, Torikai 89)
Zhejiang (Chn) 1 (Leonardo 50)

Nov 8 – Melbourne
Melbourne City (Aus) 0
Buriram United (Tha) 1 (Causic 86 pen)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ventforet Kofu	4	2	1	1	5	3	7
Melbourne City	4	2	1	1	4	2	7
Buriram United	4	2	0	2	5	4	6
Zhejiang	4	1	0	3	5	10	3

Group I

Oct 24 – Pathum Thani
BG Pathum United (Tha) 2 (Sergeev 45+1, Cardozo 82 pen)
Kawasaki Frontale (Jpn) 4 (Tono 14, Tachibanada 52, Marcinho 68, Ominami 77)

Oct 24 – Ulsan
Ulsan Hyundai (Kor) 3 (Jung Seung-hyun 5, Ludwigson 12, 18)
Johor Darul Ta'zim (Mas) 1 (Bergson 53)

Nov 7 – Kawasaki
Kawasaki Frontale (Jpn) 4 (Wakizaka 16 pen, 40 pen, Yamamura 68, Miyashiro 90+8)
BG Pathum United (Tha) 2 (Chanathip 33, 41)

Nov 7 – Johor Bahru
Johor Darul Ta'zim (Mas) 2 (Heberty 44, Akhyar 87)
Ulsan Hyundai (Kor) 1 (Esaka 69)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kawasaki Frontale	4	4	0	0	10	4	12
Ulsan Hyundai	4	2	0	2	7	5	6
Johor Darul Ta'zim	4	2	0	2	7	7	6
BG Pathum Utd	4	0	0	4	7	15	0

Group J

Oct 23 – Wuhan
Wuhan Three Towns (Chn) 2 (Wei Shihao 45, Marcao 63)
Hanoi (Vie) 1 (Pham Tuan Hai 87)

Oct 25 – Saitama
Urawa Red Diamonds (Jpn) 0
Pohang Steelers (Kor) 2 (Jeong Jae-hee 22, Goh Young-jun 49)

Nov 8 – Pohang
Pohang Steelers (Kor) 2 (Zeca 66, Kim In-sung 90+4)
Urawa Red Diamonds (Jpn) 1 (Kante 36)

Nov 8 – Hanoi
Hanoi (Vie) 2 (Pham Tuan Hai 71, 90)
Wuhan Three Towns (Chn) 1 (He Chao 10)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Pohang Steelers	4	4	0	0	11	4	12
Urawa Reds	4	1	1	2	9	6	4
Wuhan Three Towns	4	1	1	2	6	8	4
Hanoi	4	1	0	3	5	13	3

2023-24 AFC CUP

Group A

Oct 23: Al Nahda (Oma) 2-1 Al Fotuwa (Syr)
Nov 6: Al Fotuwa (Syr) 0-1 Al Nahda (Oma)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Nahda	4	3	0	1	8	3	9
Jabal Al Mukaber	2	1	0	1	1	4	3
Al Fotuwa	4	1	0	3	2	4	3
Al Ahed	2	1	0	1	2	2	3

Group B

Oct 24: Al Ittihad (Syr) 1-1 Al Kuwait (Kuw); Al Wehdat (Jor) 3-1 Al Kahrabaa (Irq)
Nov 7: Al Kuwait (Kuw) 1-1 Al Ittihad (Syr); Al Kahrabaa (Irq) 3-1 Al Wehdat (Jor)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Kahrabaa	4	2	1	1	6	4	7
Al Wehdat	4	2	0	2	7	6	6
Al Kuwait	4	1	3	0	4	3	6
Al Ittihad	4	0	2	2	2	6	2

Group C

Oct 23: Al Arabi (Kuw) 0-3 Al Riffa (Bhr); Al Zawraa (Irq) 4-1 Nejmeh (Lbn)
Nov 6: Al Riffa (Bhr) 2-1 Al Arabi (Kuw); Nejmeh (Lbn) 1-2 Al Zawraa (Irq)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Riffa	4	3	1	0	8	2	10
Al Zawraa	4	2	1	1	8	5	7
Al Arabi	4	1	1	2	3	6	4
Nejmeh	4	0	1	3	2	8	1

Group D

Oct 24: Odisha (Ind) 6-1 Maziya (Mdv); Mohun Bagan (Ind) 2-2 Bashundhara Kings (Ban)
Nov 7: Bashundhara Kings (Ban) 2-1 Mohun Bagan (Ind); Maziya (Mdv) 2-3 Odisha (Ind)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bashundhara Kings	4	2	1	1	8	8	7
Mohun Bagan	4	2	1	1	9	5	7
Odisha	4	2	0	2	11	10	6
Maziya	4	1	0	3	7	12	3

Group E

Oct 26: Merw Mary (Tkm) 1-2 Altyn Asyr (Tkm); Ravshan Kulob (Tjk) 0-1 Abdysh-Ata Kant (Kgz)
Nov 9: Altyn Asyr (Tkm) 1-0 Merw Mary (Tkm); Abdysh-Ata Kant (Kgz) 1-0 Ravshan Kulob (Tjk)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Abdysh-Ata Kant	4	3	1	0	6	1	10
Altyn Asyr	4	2	1	1	4	5	7
Merw Mary	4	0	2	2	2	4	2
Ravshan Kulob	4	0	2	2	1	3	2

Group F

Oct 26: Phnom Penh Crown (Cam) 3-0 Macarthur (Aus); DH Cebu (Phi) 1-0 Shan United (Mya)
Nov 9: Macarthur (Aus) 5-0 Phnom Penh Crown (Cam); Shan United (Mya) 1-1 DH Cebu (Phi)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Macarthur	4	3	0	1	16	5	9
Phnom Penh Crown	4	3	0	1	10	5	9
DH Cebu	4	1	1	2	4	12	4
Shan United	4	0	1	3	1	9	1

Group G

Oct 26: Central Coast Mariners (Aus) 6-3 Bali United (Idn); Terengganu (Mas) 2-2 Stallion Laguna (Phi)
Nov 8: Bali United (Idn) 1-2 Central Coast Mariners (Aus); Stallion Laguna (Phi) 2-3 Terengganu (Mas)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Central Coast	4	3	0	1	17	6	9
Terengganu	4	2	2	0	7	5	8
Bali United	4	1	1	2	10	11	4
Stallion Laguna	4	0	1	3	7	19	1

Group H

Oct 25: PSM Makassar (Idn) 3-1 Hougang United (Sgp); Haiphong (Vie) 3-1 Sabah (Mas)
Nov 9: Sabah (Mas) 4-1 Haiphong (Vie); Hougang United (Sgp) 1-3 PSM Makassar (Idn)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sabah	4	3	0	1	14	5	9
Haiphong	4	2	0	2	8	8	6
PSM Makassar	4	2	0	2	6	10	6
Hougang United	4	1	0	3	5	10	3

Group I

Oct 26: Taichung Futuro (Tpe) 2-1 Taiwan Steel (Tpe); Chao Pak Kei (Mac) 0-1 Ulaanbaatar (Mng)
Nov 9: Taiwan Steel (Tpe) 5-1 Taichung Futuro (Tpe); Ulaanbaatar (Mng) 1-0 Chao Pak Kei (Mac)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Taichung Futuro	4	3	0	1	6	6	9
Ulaanbaatar	4	3	0	1	5	3	9
Taiwan Steel	3	1	0	2	7	6	3
Chao Pak Kei	3	0	0	3	0	3	0

CHINA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Shanghai Port (C)	30	19	6	5	61	30	63
Shandong Taishan	30	16	10	4	59	25	58
Zhejiang	30	16	7	7	57	34	55
Chengdu Rongcheng	30	15	8	7	51	32	53
Shanghai Shenhua	30	15	7	8	34	31	52
Beijing Guoan	30	14	9	7	53	35	51
Wuhan Three Towns	30	14	9	7	51	35	51
Tianjin Jinmen Tiger	30	11	15	4	40	29	48
Changchun Yatai	30	10	9	11	44	48	39
Henan	30	9	9	12	38	40	36
Meizhou Hakka	30	9	7	14	42	54	34
Cangzhou Mighty Lions	30	8	7	15	29	60	31
Qingdao Hainiu	30	7	7	16	34	45	28
Nantong Zhiyun	30	4	10	16	26	42	22
Dalian Pro (R)	30	3	11	16	25	47	20
Shenzhen (R)	30	3	3	24	22	79	12

GUAM

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Wings (C)	12	10	0	2	56	22	30
BOG Strykers	12	9	0	3	66	20	27
Islanders	12	6	0	6	35	43	18
Quality	12	4	0	8	30	42	12
Shipyard HAYA	12	1	0	11	26	86	3
Rovers	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

KYRGYZSTAN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Abdysh-Ata (C)	27	17	6	4	58	22	57
Alay	27	14	9	4	36	23	51
Dordoi Bishkek	27	14	8	5	54	24	50
Alga	27	12	8	7	52	35	44
Muras United	27	12	6	9	41	34	42
Talant	27	8	10	9	32	38	34
Neftchi	27	9	5	13	29	38	32
Ilbirs	27	7	5	15	31	53	26
OshMU Aldier	27	6	5	16	29	52	23
Kara-Balta (R)	27	3	4	20	20	63	13

CONCACAF

2023 CARIBBEAN CUP

Semi-Finals – 1st Leg

Oct 24 – Kingston
Harbour View (Jam) 0
Cavalier (Jam) 5 (Thomas 5, Calvin 12, Clarke 64 og, Laing 72, Allen 87)

Oct 25 – Moca
Moca (Dom) 1 (Ascona 30 pen)
Robinhood (Sur) 0

Semi-Finals – 2nd Leg

Oct 31 – Kingston
Cavalier (Jam) 0
Harbour View (Jam) 0
Cavalier win 5-0 on aggregate

Nov 2 – Paramaribo
Robinhood (Sur) 1 (Singodikromo 90+3)
Moca (Dom) 0
1-1 on aggregate. Robinhood win 3-2 on penalties

2023 CENTRAL AMERICAN CUP

Play-Ins – 1st Leg

Oct 24 – Cartago
Cartagines (Crc) 1 (Daly 83)
Comunicaciones (Gua) 1 (Gordillo 26)

Oct 25 – Tegucigalpa
Motagua (Hon) 2 (Auzmendi 72, 90)
Saprissa (Crc) 2 (Chirinos 42, Madrigal 84)

Play-Ins – 2nd Leg

Oct 31 – Guatemala City
Comunicaciones (Gua) 1 (Aguilar 27)
Cartagines (Crc) 1 (Hernandez 52 pen)
AET. 2-2 on aggregate. Comunicaciones win 5-4 on pens to qualify for 2024 CONCACAF Champions Cup

Nov 1 – San Jose
Saprissa (Crc) 4 (Rodriguez 2, Waston 9, Sinclair 45+1, Paradela 86)
Motagua (Hon) 0
Saprissa win 6-2 on aggregate to qualify for 2024 CONCACAF Champions Cup

Semi-Finals – 1st Leg

Oct 25 – San Jose
Herediano (Crc) 2 (Cruz 46, Godinez 50)
Alajuelense (Crc) 2 (Mora 7, Venegas 49)

Oct 26 – Esteli
Real Esteli (Nca) 1 (Mendez 90+1)
Independiente (Pan) 0

Semi-Finals – 2nd Leg

Nov 1 – Alajuela
Alajuelense (Crc) 2 (Borges 8, Campbell 90+5 pen)
Herediano (Crc) 2 (Torres 40, Rubio 64 pen)
4-4 on aggregate. Alajuelense win 5-4 on pens

Nov 2 – Panama City
Independiente (Pan) 2 (Aguila 14, Contreras 63)
Real Esteli (Nca) 2 (Hernandez 46, Bonilla 81)
Real Esteli win 3-2 on aggregate

CANADA

Regular Season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cavalry*	28	16	7	5	46	27	55
Forge* (C)	28	11	9	8	39	32	42
HFX Wanderers*	28	11	9	8	39	32	42
Pacific*	28	11	7	10	42	35	40
York United*	28	11	5	12	35	44	38
Atletico Ottawa	28	10	6	12	38	34	36
Vancouver FC	28	8	5	15	28	50	29
Valour	28	6	8	14	25	38	26

*Advance to the finals stage

Play-In Round

Oct 11: Pacific 1-0 York United

Quarter-Final

Oct 14: HFX Wanderers 0-1 Pacific

Semi-Finals

Oct 14: Cavalry 1-2 Forge
Oct 21: Cavalry 2-1 Pacific

Final

Oct 28: Forge 2-1 Cavalry

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Championship Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cibao* (C)	10	5	4	1	21	11	19
Moca*	10	5	4	1	12	6	19
Atletico Pantoja*	10	5	1	4	19	14	16
Atlantico*	10	3	3	4	15	19	12
Vega Real	10	2	3	5	6	13	9
Universidad O&M	10	2	1	7	12	22	7

*Advance to the finals stage

Semi-Finals

Sep 30-Oct 1: Atletico Pantoja 0-0 Moca; Atlantico 0-3 Cibao
Oct 8-9: Moca 2-1 Atletico Pantoja (agg 2-1); Cibao 2-0 Atlantico (agg 5-0)

Final

Oct 22: Moca 0-0 Cibao
Oct 29: Cibao 3-0 Moca (agg 3-0)

UNITED STATES

Eastern Conference Regular Season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
FC Cincinnati*	34	20	9	5	57	39	69
Orlando City**	34	18	9	7	55	39	63
Columbus Crew**	34	16	9	9	67	46	57
Philadelphia Union**	34	15	10	9	57	41	55
New England Revolution**	34	15	10	9	58	46	55
Atlanta United**	34	13	12	9	66	53	51
Nashville SC**	34	13	10	11	39	32	49
New York Red Bulls***	34	11	10	13	36	39	43
Charlotte FC***	34	10	13	11	45	52	43
CF Montreal	34	12	5	17	36	52	41
New York City FC	34	9	14	11	35	39	41
D.C. United	34	10	10	14	45	49	40
Chicago Fire	34	10	10	14	39	51	40
Inter Miami	34	9	7	18	41	54	34
Toronto FC	34	4	10	20	26	59	22

*Win the Supporters' Shield and advance to the MLS Cup play-offs
**Advance to the MLS Cup play-offs
***Advance to the wild card round

Western Conference Regular Season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
St. Louis City*	34	17	5	12	62	45	56
Seattle Sounders*	34	14	11	9	41	32	53
Los Angeles FC*	34	14	10	10	54	39	52
Houston Dynamo*	34	14	9	11	51	38	51
Real Salt Lake*	34	14	8	12	48	50	50
Vancouver Whitecaps*	34	12	12	10	55	48	48
FC Dallas*	34	11	13	10	41	37	46
Sporting Kansas City**	34	12	8	14	48	51	44
San Jose Earthquakes**	34	10	14	10	39	43	44
Portland Timbers	34	11	10	13	46	58	43
Minnesota United	34	10	11	13	46	51	41
Austin FC	34	10	9	15	49	55	39
LA Galaxy	34	8	12	14	51	67	36
Colorado Rapids	34	5	12	17	26	54	27

*Advance to the MLS Cup play-offs
**Advance to the wild card round

AFRICA

SAO TOME & PRINCIPE

Sao Tome League

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Militar 6 Setembro (C)	22	17	3	2	43	14	54
Agrosport	22	16	4	2	41	16	52
Inter Bom-Bom	22	12	2	8	44	30	38
Alianca Nacional	22	11	4	7	34	26	37
Trindade	22	10	7	5	35	22	37
UDRA	22	9	4	9	36	33	31
Caixao Grande	22	8	4	10	31	32	28
Vitoria	22	5	11	6	22	24	26
Palmar Lusitano	22	6	5	11	31	34	23
Sporting Praia Cruz	22	6	4	12	26	37	22
Neves (R)	22	6	2	14	22	39	20
Sporting Sao Tome (R)	22	0	2	20	12	70	2

Principe League

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Operario	20	16	1	3	56	13	49
Porto Real	20	14	3	3	70	21	45
Sporting Principe	20	8	4	8	34	38	28
Sundy	20	7	4	9	24	37	25
UDAPB	20	4	3	13	27	56	15
1º de Maio	20	3	1	16	20	66	10

Final

Oct 27: Militar 6 Setembro 1-1 Operario
Nov 3: Operario 1-1 Militar 6 Setembro (agg 2-2p)

OCEANIA

SOLOMON ISLANDS

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Solomon Warriors (C)	22	15	3	4	72	19	48
Central Coast	22	14	5	3	51	16	47
Waneagu United	22	14	5	3	35	16	47
Honiara City	22	13	5	4	45	29	44
KOSSA	22	12	5	5	53	35	41
Marist Fire	22	8	7	7	39	25	31
Laugu United	22	8	4	10	26	36	28
SOSA	22	7	6	9	32	29	27
Southern United	22	8	2	12	40	42	26
Henderson Eels	22	7	3	12	36	30	24
Juniper	22	3	1	18	32	82	10
Real Kakamora (R)	22	0	0	22	14	116	0

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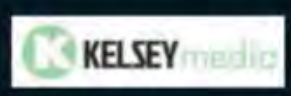

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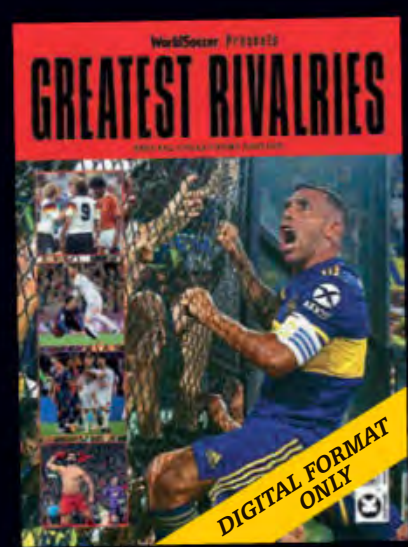

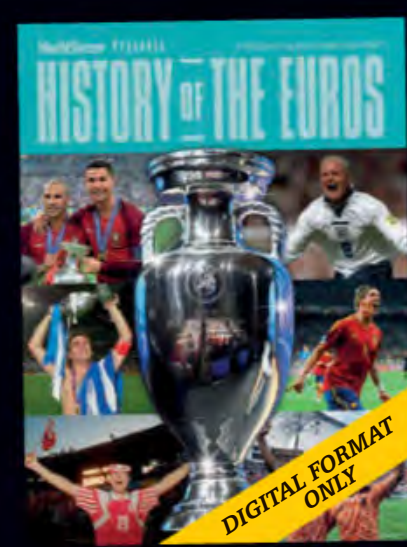

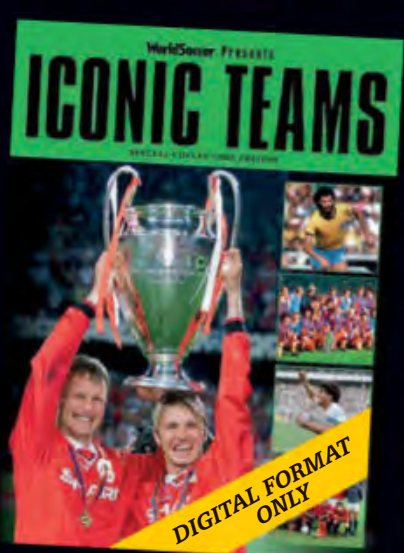

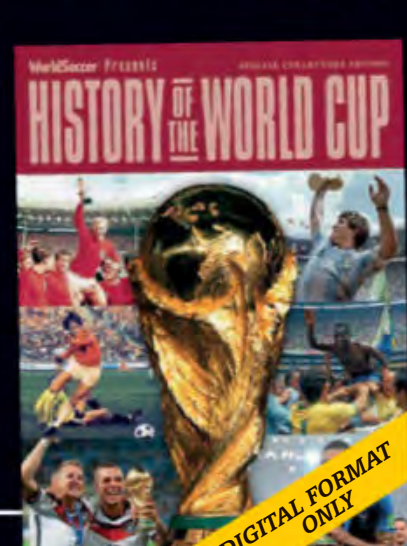

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